

# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Volume 33 : Number Two : Summer 2012



Interior Freedom

The Fragmented Self at Prayer

Coping with Loss

PROCESSED

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## HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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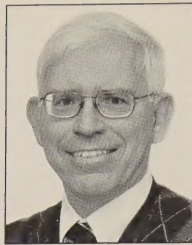
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Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 double-spaced pages), with no more than 6 recommended readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing. When quoting the Bible, the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is preferred.

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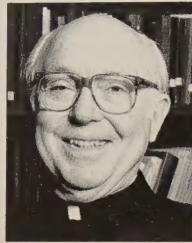
Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

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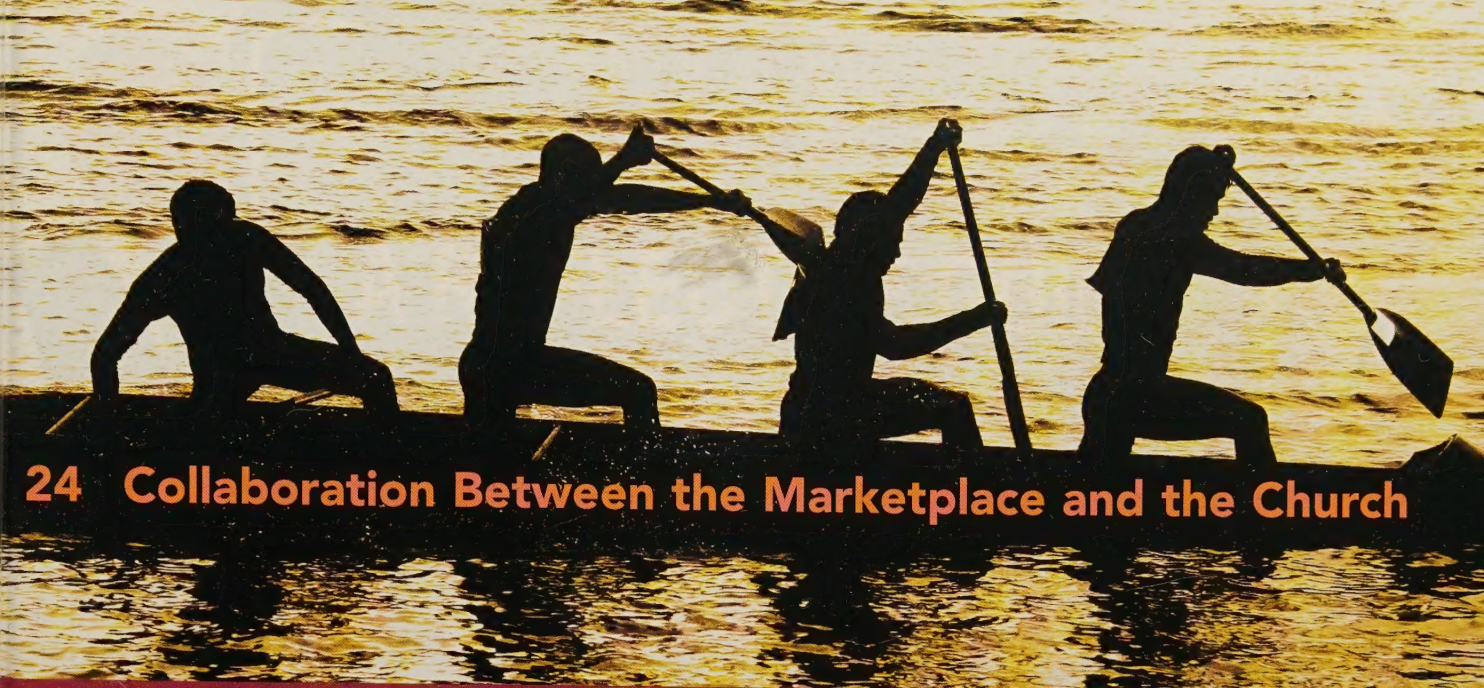
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# Editor's Page

## Do Not Be Discouraged

All around me I see Catholics who are discouraged and angry about what they see happening in the church today. "I feel like my church has left me," I heard a priest say recently. I know some people who go to Mass reluctantly or not at all because they find the revised missal translation so off-putting and cannot accept the language in the consecration that says Christ died "for many" rather than "for all." Others I know, deeply spiritual gay people living in committed relationships, say they cannot go to Mass anymore in good conscience. Friends who are sisters express to me the hurt they feel because of the Vatican's recent action against the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. I too find all of this discouraging and difficult. And although I have not joined those who have distanced themselves from the church, I struggle to reconcile my stance with that of others who have chosen to remove themselves, at least for now, from participation in the life of the church.

There is of course the temptation to deny or minimize the issue. I could say, "These are not really my issues." But I cannot deny the pain of the absence of others or ignore the suffering of those who struggle on. And ignoring my own discouragement will only have a corrosive affect on my soul. So in the spirit of offering encouragement—to myself and hopefully to others—here are some of the things I try to remember and do to maintain perspective in the face of discouragement.

*Honor my own experience.* There is nothing wrong with feeling angry, frustrated or alienated. Many of us have, to some degree, interiorized the message, "I shouldn't feel that way." Examine your feelings, identify carefully their causes and affects, seek support from others and be open to the possibility that the Spirit can speak even in these painful emotions.

*Remember that the church is universal.* I am strengthened by the realization that the church is a global reality and that all of us are united in the same Eucharist celebrated around the world. I look at my discouragement in light of the challenges Catholics face elsewhere and take courage from their faith.

*Keep a sense of history.* I remember other Christians who have remained faithful in the face of rejection—Teilhard de Chardin, John Courtney Murray, Thomas Merton. The church has changed over my lifetime and it will continue to change. This is not the endpoint. There is reason to hold onto hope.

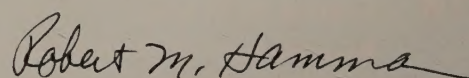
*Remember that we are all sinful.* Like those whom I may disagree with, I too am imperfect. While I may judge their decisions, I try not to judge them personally. Rather, I seek to recognize the good that they do and find common ground where I can. And I seek to forgive others as I rely on God's merciful forgiveness to me.

*Focus on Jesus.* A pastor I know who works among some powerful people in Washington recently said in reference to the controversy du jour, "We have to get back to Jesus." The church exists for the sake of Jesus and the gospel. I can't ignore or minimize the political divisions in the church, but I try to keep them in that perspective.

*Pray.* I pray that I will be open to God's leading me (even in directions I would prefer not to go) and to believe in and recognize his presence in the church. I pray for the gifts of the Spirit that I need most: strength, patience, prudence and trust.

*Act.* In the end, Catholicism has to be about doing something! I remember the words of Jesus, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father (Matthew 7:27). If I allow myself to become so mired in discouragement with the church that I stop being a Christian, what's the point? And if I seek to live as Christ, to serve others as he did, this will ground me all the more in his body, the church.

This issue of **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT** offers a variety of encouraging articles on living the Christian life, personally and in community. Perspectives on interior freedom, prayer and grief are complemented by thoughtful articles on collaboration, communal discernment and religious life. We hope you will find them helpful.



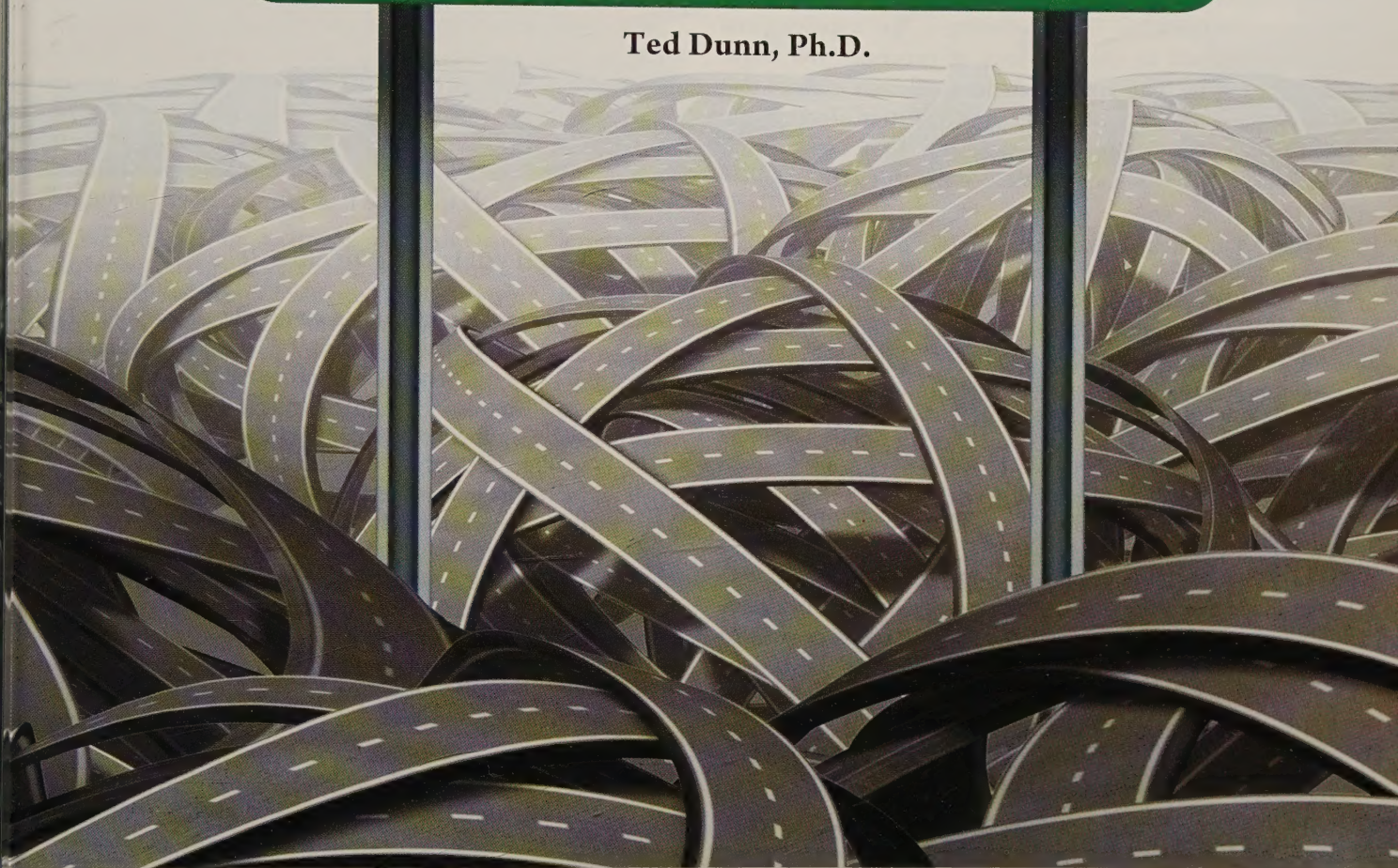
Robert M. Hamma





# INTERIOR FREEDOM: A REFLECTIVE GUIDE AND EXERCISE

Ted Dunn, Ph.D.



*"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."  
John 8:32*

For those who have engaged in the spiritual work of personal or communal discernment, the concept of interior freedom is known as a requisite element for listening deeply to God. Sifting and sorting what is of God versus the urgings of our own ego is a lifetime endeavor to be sure. However, when communities use communal discernment for electing new leaders or making major decisions, or when we personally discern new life choices, there is typically a date certain for decisions to be made. In such time-bound processes of discernment the work of interior freedom needs even more attention.

Whether we are Quaker or Catholic, Buddhist or Baptist, our ability to hear what God has to say is only made possible when we are interiorly free enough to listen. In the Catholic tradition, interior freedom is said to be key for establishing a space hospitable enough for the soul to converse with the promptings of the Spirit. In every religious tradition, the emptying of our worldly concerns, the easing of our egos and the stripping of our masks are essential in order to allow the eternal light to shine more fully.



Interior freedom is not an easy concept to grasp, let alone attain in practice. Is the notion of “interior freedom” (or “holy indifference”) just a religious abstraction? How do you hold the tension of what you hope will be an outcome of your discernment while remaining open to an unknown outcome, surrendering to a process no matter where it leads? How do you remain passionately invested in your convictions and detached at the same time? What if your time is different than God’s time or the allotted time of a communal process? Integrating what psychologists know about how we cope with painful truths along with the traditional spiritual knowledge of discernment will aid us in understanding this paradoxical and ethereal concept of interior freedom.

What I am offering here are not replacements for the many time-honored approaches to discernment (e.g., Ignatian discernment). Rather, I am offering a few supplemental processes to add to the repertoire of processes you might already be using. This article includes a reflective exercise that many groups have found helpful in my facilitation of communal discernment processes. Hopefully, these will assist you in your efforts to enlarge the chamber where your deepest truths reside.

## CONTEXT

Some years ago I was directing a discernment retreat and, as is my practice, I offered a reflective guide to assist those who were discerning the call to elected leadership. The planning committee was particularly concerned because their community was relatively new to communal discernment and expressed anxiety about opening up and sharing on a more personal level. They asked if I could help the participants ease their concerns so they could move to a deeper level in their discernment.

Among the many prayers and processes used, I offered them this reflection and exercise that I am now sharing with you. The reflection and companion exercise were originally designed with these goals in mind: 1) To normalize the fact that all of us, even the most holy among us, have urges to hide from truths that are painful; 2) to give a concrete understanding of this otherwise abstract concept of interior freedom and provide specific ways in which it can be enhanced; 3) to help the participants name and claim their own ways of defending against disturbing truths and constricting their inner freedom; and, 4) to help them take ownership and make choices about easing their defenses so as to embrace the truth that Jesus promised would set us free.

As you read the reflection that follows please understand that its light-hearted tone was used to ease the anxiety of participants and help them talk more specifically about the concept of interior freedom. The setup for the room included various religious symbols to aid their discernment. Strangely enough it also included a number of pharmacy bottles containing “Truth Tablets” (explained below). The Truth Tablets (actually M & M’s) became a palatable and playful symbol of the truths they hoped to discover and share along the way. It is worth noting that these Truth Tablets were entirely consumed over the course of the retreat—a testimony, perhaps, to the truth they yearned would set them free!

This particular process was so effective that I have since used it with a number of groups embarking on a journey of communal discernment. While the reflection is set in a playful tone, it focuses upon the poignant fact that as much as we all seek the truth, we all hide from it as well. I wish to normalize these hide-and-seek games so we can more easily own and explore these. If we don’t know that we are hiding, how would we even gauge our inner freedom? If we don’t know our inimitable ways of managing uncomfortable truths, how can we ever make a conscious choice to ease our defenses and set our truth free?

The companion exercise on naming, claiming and making choices on the defenses we use is also included in this article. While it sounds a bit psychological, please understand that it is intended to aid in the spiritual work of discernment. It is to aid in your becoming more whole and holy, and therefore, more attuned to the movements of grace. The list provides concrete examples of the many ways we disguise, control and conceal truths that we otherwise experience as aversive. I then offer suggestions for working with your defenses in order to expand your interior freedom. I offer this reflection and exercise for those who are seeking to walk more deeply and honestly with God in discerning an important call.

## THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE, IF . . .

Wouldn’t it be something if you could take a pill and the truth would be revealed? If Truth Tablets could be manufactured and bottled, if they could be purchased at the Tabernacle Pharmacy, the bottle would probably have wrapped around it a warning label. It might read something like this:

**Warning:** Use only as directed for freedom from sin and wayward pursuits, as well as relief from unnecessary pain and depression.

Common side effects may include upset stomach, headaches and insomnia. You may experience heart palpitations, weakness and fatigue. Leakage of bodily fluids, including sweaty palms and uncontrollable tearing, is known to occur when taken during times of personal crisis. Identity confusion may also occur. If taken in excess, or without proper nourishment, conflict and tension may arise with intimate others. Consult Psalm 139 if side effects persist for more than a week.

Lastly, do not share these Truth Tablets with others who are not seeking the truth. If they think they already know all of the truth they wish to know, these pills could be hazardous to their health!

## *Truth by Way of the Gospel*

Now, without these Truth Tablets that make truth-telling and truth-listening easy, would you *really* want to seek the truth? Most of us have probably come to realize through our own experience that Jesus knew what he was talking about when he said: “You will know the Truth, and the Truth will set you free” (John 8:32). Indeed, the truth does set us free. Intellectually, we know this. Through our lived experience, we know this. Spiritually, we hunger for this. Emotionally, however, we dread it. We humans have a love-hate relationship with the truth. Why? Because we know the path toward spiritual enlightenment is an inherently painful one.





We know, for example, that the most important discoveries during our lifetime have been ones that disrupted our lives. These changed who we knew ourselves to be and led us to alter or leave significant relationships. The birth of new truth demands that we understand our life differently and behave in new ways. The emergence of truth requires that we make room for the “new” through a labor of letting go. What are some of the things we are asked to let go of? We are asked to let go of:

- Traditions and the way things have always been;
- The known, the comfortable and the familiar;
- Our pride and our need to be right;
- Relationships that once helped us to grow to who we are today, but can no longer assist in who we are becoming;
- Ministries to which we were once called, but which no longer express how God is calling us to offer our gifts;
- Our need for control, to figure things out ahead of time or be given guarantees so we don’t need to rely on our faith, one another, or God;
- Our old ways of understanding our faith, who God is in our life and the reason we have been graced with the gift of life.

When we let go of something we once valued, someone we have loved or something that we have grown accustomed to, like it or not, it hurts. We humans, by our very nature, get attached to things. We get attached to buildings and land, to people and principles, and to our patterns of going through life. It seems we are made for getting attached. It is our very nature to do so. Getting unattached, however, does not seem natural at all. We have to work at it. Letting go is hard for us because it hurts.

Consequently, while we want to be set free by searching out the truth, because of all this hurt we tend to go into the search a little tightly wrapped (if not kicking and screaming) because we know it’s going to hurt. The bigger the truth, the more important the truth, the more we want it and the more we fight it. Our spirit-being wants to respond by saying yes. Our human reaction, however, is to say, “Wait a minute. How much

will this cost?” We ask ourselves, *Is the freedom that comes by way of the truth worth the labor involved to discern it?*

Our life experience would tell us that once a new truth is finally out, once we are on the other side, we often find that living in that truth is not so bad. In fact, if in our efforts to give birth to it we have owned it, claimed it and worked it through, then living it out isn’t so bad at all. Once on the other side, we do find ourselves freer. We find ourselves less encumbered by the baggage we unloaded. We are freer to breathe in new life now that we have cleaned out the clutter. We find that being more ourselves strengthens us. We find ourselves closer to God and others with whom we struggled along the way because we went through something powerful, something intimate, together. We find ourselves grateful to God for the choice and gift of new life.

So the caveat to what Jesus said, “The truth will set you free,” would go something like this: The truth will set you free *if* you are willing to go through what it takes to own it, claim it and work it through. The good news is that we can be set free by the truth. The bad news is that it will cost us something to do so.

#### *Truth by Way of Discernment*

Given that the process of communal discernment is one of seeking to understand the community’s call and God’s intentions and how these align with your soul’s desire, and given that such a search will involve the discovery of truths heretofore unknown, then it stands to reason that a bit of pain may be encountered along the way. For some of you, the pain may be a lot, while for others, just a little. For all of you who wish to be set free, however, the tension between your human aversion to pain and your spiritual hunger for freedom will be experienced. This tension, this ambivalence about the truth, directly impacts your interior freedom. The fidelity to your true self will be tested.

Simply put, interior freedom is a state of mind and heart that allows your inner truth and wisdom to be known, accepted and assimilated. It is like a chamber inside yourself, where your truth and God’s truth merge. Your freedom to accept the



truth, the size of this interior room, is in direct proportion to your readiness to receive the truth. The greater one's room is, the greater is one's ability to seek and accept the truth. If you are frightened of what the truth might bring, ambivalent because it might be disturbing, then the chamber shrinks. If, on the other hand, you are ready to receive the truth no matter the cost, then the room is enlarged. Your interior freedom is determined by how well you have prepared your heart, readied yourself to listen and worked with the fears that can otherwise constrict the truth and render you unfree.

So, given that your goal is discerning the truth and you could easily be ambivalent about what you might discover, then you are going to have to work at staying open. You will need to work toward enhancing your interior freedom and more fully embracing your true self. What if your physician declined to write you a prescription for Truth Tablets? What might you be able to do to ease the grip of fear, thereby making more room for your true self and God to converse?

## WORKING TOWARD INTERIOR FREEDOM

Here are five suggestions to help you work toward greater interior freedom. While reflection questions and processes can be developed for all five, for the purposes and limits of this article we will focus the companion exercise only on the first of these five suggestions—relaxing your defenses.

### 1. *Relax your defenses.*

Defenses are a normal and necessary part of our human condition. We have them to ward off pain. Without them, we'd be like a turtle without its shell. They provide each of us with our own highly personalized pain management system. The flipside of this protective mechanism is that, by its very nature, it also distorts the truth. Defenses blunt our affect and blur our reality. Defenses shield us from being intimate not only with our inner selves and others, but with God. How we work with our defenses, therefore, has a direct bearing upon our degree of interior freedom and, therefore, the quality of our discernment.

Consequently, making choices about easing our defenses (or not) and determining what truths to pursue (or not) is an important aspect of working toward greater interior freedom. Unless we make choices to work with our defenses, our defenses will control us. In the anticipation of a painful discovery we unconsciously steel our defenses and set up firewalls. The same walls that protect us from potential pain also shield us from the truth. The truth becomes encapsulated and hidden behind our firewalls. So, unless we choose otherwise, we are not interiorly free.

Our defenses work outside our awareness, severely limiting our inner freedom until and unless we make conscious choices to free ourselves. We can choose to employ our defenses to the fullest or ease them and use only what we need. We can choose to open up some issues and not others. We can explore truths partially or more fully. We can learn to use our defenses more flexibly and by choice, rather than reactively and to extremes. In the companion exercise that follows I will invite you to name, claim and make choices about your defenses.

### 2. *Connect to a touchstone faith experience.*

The paradoxes and mysteries of discernment are made clearer to us if we simply recall our own faith experiences. Perhaps if

you go back into these, you can use them as touchstones for discernment. If you can recall such moments in your own life, perhaps you will recall what it is like to be truly free. You will know more clearly the contrast between genuine freedom and something less. Let me give you just two of examples from my own life, one of birth and one of death, when I knew without any doubt that I was free and standing upon holy ground.

The birth of each of my three children was an experience wherein time stood still and I was completely and utterly aware for the first time in my life that miracles really existed and were a part of my life too. As I awkwardly fumbled to companion their arrival I became poignantly aware for the first time in my life of the awesome experience of God. It was painful and messy, frightening and beautiful all at the same time. In that labor and delivery room, I knew I was on holy ground.

When I journeyed with my sister-in-law and friend, Sr. Norma Lipsmeyer, as she passed through the doorway from this world to the next, I knew beyond any shadow of doubt that I was on holy ground. Ordinary time and ordinary life were irrelevant. I wanted nothing but to be fully present to Norma and my wife Beth, and I could barely stand to leave the room. Sorrow was as strong as the joy that enveloped it as Norma arranged for what she referred to as her "come to Jesus party." She ministered and comforted us to her last breath, as we did for her as well. I knew I was amidst the sacred. As we stood vigil to her passing I knew we were standing on holy ground.

These kinds of experiences are known to all of us on a faith journey. In all of these holy moments, the experience of being led is palpable. The sense of presence to one another and to God is all-consuming. Nothing matters more than just being here. During times such as these, pain and joy, death and life, mess and beauty commingle without the usual need for one to elbow out the other. All emotions are acceptable, as if to say, "of course" to the whole of our human experience. There is no shame or need to justify what is occurring. Ordinary time becomes surreal, sometimes standing still, sometimes speeding by, but it is irrelevant to just being present.

Ground yourself with scripture passages, images and memories that take you back and connect you with your own *touchstone faith experience*. Such an experience is one wherein you knew in every fiber of your being, in the deepest part of your being where your soul resides, that you were responding to God's invitation. Recall such a time in your life, wherein you struggled to discover God's intention, wherein you yearned for life anew, and you discovered God and yourself all over again. Recall the strength you experienced when standing upon the rock of God's Truth. Draw upon these memories and the strength of your faith experiences to assist you in reclaiming your freedom.

### 3. *Suspend your judgments.*

Often times our inner freedom is severely constricted by the boxes, labels and judgments we use. Give yourself permission to think outside the box and entertain possibilities without rushing to judge them as viable or not, desirable or not, reasonable or not. You'll need to allow yourself the freedom to play with fantasy, unfettered by the rigors of reality. You'll need to free yourself to wonder and imagine things that otherwise would be censored by what is appropriate, "pooh-poohed" because they seem impractical or avoided because of the judgments of others.



You'll need to give yourself permission to play with possibilities for now, trusting that the time for judging them as realistic will come in earnest down the road. You'll need to know that frivolity and fantasy are just as necessary as the more sublime and sobering moments of prayer and reflection. Leave the judge and jury outside.

#### 4. Explore your resistance.

Explore, rather than avoid, your resistance to saying "yes" to wherever God is calling you. Consider your resistance as a source of great insight, not a barrier. Listen to it. What is your resistance? What is it telling you? How might your resistance be a source of strength and a gift? How might your resistance be an *as yet undiscovered piece of the truth* that, if owned by you, could set you free?

Understand and own your resistance, then look beyond it. What would your liberation from this resistance look like? How might you better integrate what is calling you forth or holding you back so as to deepen the truth, rather than oblige only one part of the truth? How can two, seemingly oppositional pieces of the truth be reconciled and brought together? What new way of looking at your resistance might provide greater integration and a bridge forward?

Listen to your language. Is it a language of choice or being a victim of circumstances or the pressure from others? Alter your language to ensure that you are making choices, proactively and with your eyes wide open. For example, change your language from "I can't" to "I won't" or "I choose not to" and see how that influences your inner freedom. Reflect upon these questions and search out the gift of your resistance.

#### 5. Visualize what liberation would look like.

Recall the words of Jesus about setting the captives free and bringing forth life in abundance. Ask yourself: *What would it be like if I were radically free of all the things that inhibit and keep me from being my true self? What would it be like if I were radically free from the "shoulds" and "ought to's" in my life, of judging and putting people in boxes?* Open yourself to God's grace in search of this kind of freedom.

Let your imagination run with this newly discovered, if only imagined, freedom. What might you be doing differently in your life, if you lived more fully out of your true self and not some persona? How might you be different in your presence with others? Who would be your circle of intimate friends? Then juxtapose this with your current way of being and your present path in life. Ask yourself, *Who am I growing to become? How is God nudging me, calling me, yearning for me to transform my life?*

In summary, these are some of the ways to work toward greater interior freedom:

- Ease the defenses that constrict your truth and conceal self-knowledge;
- Return to your touchstone faith experiences—those moments and places in your life where you best meet God;
- Play with possibilities, think outside of the box, and suspend your judgment;
- Explore your own resistance in order to gain insight and become freer from it;
- Visualize what liberation would look like beyond the struggle, to be radically free.

*What would it be like  
if I were radically  
free of all the things  
that inhibit and keep  
me from being my  
true self?*



## EXERCISE: WORKING WITH YOUR DEFENSES

This exercise is intended to assist you in naming, claiming and possibly easing your defenses so that you can make more conscious and deliberate choices regarding the truths you might wish to discover. Such self-knowledge and proactive choices will bring about greater interior freedom.

### Step 1. Name and claim your defenses.

What follows is a list of defenses or ways of coping with truths that are potentially disturbing and, therefore, eschewed. You may discover that you have ways of coping that are not listed or

are experienced somewhat differently. That's fine. Don't feel confined to the boxes or view these as good or bad. A zebra's stripes or a turtle's shell are not good or bad. Remember, we all employ defenses in the threat of pain. We instinctually *fight* or *flee* in a variety of ways.

Look through and study the list, and place a checkmark next to all that apply. Write in your own defenses or modify the ones offered so they fit you. Then go back and prioritize five or so that you use most often. Increasing your awareness of your own style is the first step toward greater control over how and when to use them.

✓	Defense	Description
	Acting In	This is the same as somaticizing (see "somaticize"). It means absorbing our emotions inwardly, with our body, instead of expressing them. As a result we might get a variety of bodily reactions (e.g., headaches, stomachaches, ulcers, diarrhea, rashes, twitches, etc.).
	Acting Out	Acting out our emotions (e.g., gambling, drinking, eating, driving fast, running) helps to get our uncomfortable feelings out of our system.
	Attacking	Verbally or physically attacking others in order to ward off the threat.
	Canonizing	Using canon law as a way to intellectualize and mask uncomfortable feelings. It is a way to sway an argument by using an external authority (see also "psychologize" or "theologize").
	Compartmentalize	Putting your emotions in a drawer and dealing with them later. Dealing with one issue at a time rather than swimming in them all at the same time.
	Denial	This is a way to disconnect the feeling from the event. I know it's happening, but I have no feelings about it. An example of this is covering your eyes when watching the scary part of a movie (i.e., If I can't see it, it's not really there).
	Displacement	Scapegoating someone or something else for the problem (e.g., you are mad at someone, but take it out on someone else)
	Eating	Over-eating (binging) comfort food helps some people cope with stress. Under-eating (fasting) helps others.
	Idealize-Devalue	People are seen either as wonderful or horrible. Relationships and emotions are easier to handle if people are put in simple boxes (good/evil) and the gray is left out.
	Identification	Just as children identify with their parents, we identify with our mentors. Identifying with others can be a way of learning but also a way of handling difficulty vicariously.
	Incorporation	This means swallowing what someone says hook, line and sinker. This is emotionally easier than having to chew on it.
	Intellectualize	Taking any area of intellectual knowledge and using it to mask uncomfortable feelings (see also "psychologize," "spiritualize," "canonize," "journalize" and "theologize").
	Isolation	Blunting all feelings. It is as if a big wet blanket is thrown over the emotional side of life and wipes out all affect.
	Journalize	Using your journals to work through the emotion.
	Judgmentalism	Looking at the speck in another's eye is a lot easier then looking at your own plank. Judging and labeling others puts people in a neat package and keeps the focus away from your issues.
	Minimize	This is an effort to make a molehill out of a mountain of pain. We say things like, "It's no big deal" and "I'm fine," in order to talk ourselves into feeling more at ease with something.





## Defense

## Description

### Moralize

It is easier to assume someone is "sinful," "bad," or "wrong" than to wrangle with the gray nuances of life choices.

### Negate

This is the "yes-but" disease. This means that every time someone offers a hopeful suggestion, we negate it. We take away the hope because it is too risky to hope any more. We answer suggestions with, "Yes, but . . ." then proceed to explain why what someone is suggesting wouldn't work.

### Obfuscate

We lie, spin, lob red herrings and create smoke screens to confuse and ward off someone who is upset. We can also lie to ourselves rather than face a difficult truth. Creating confusion is a powerful defense against clarity that hurts.

### Over-Generalize

When we over-generalize, we gloss over all sorts of things, especially the uncomfortable emotions. This is easier than chewing on the particulars and the exceptions.

### Over-Personalize

Some people are willing to take the blame for just about anything, rather than face the challenge of others (e.g., "Yeah, you're right. It is all my fault").

### Passive-Aggression

This occurs when aggression is veiled or masked in an expression that carries another face (e.g., sarcasm). The aggressor can hide behind the meaning, saying, in a sense, "I didn't really mean to hurt you. It was just a joke" (or a mistake, or whatever).

### Projection

Projection means putting the blame onto someone else for the pain I am in (e.g., You made me so mad. It's all your fault).

### Psychologize

Using psychology and "psychobabble" as a way to intellectualize and mask uncomfortable feelings (see Canonize or Spiritualize).

### Rationalize

This is a way of finding excuses for something happening that eases the pain (e.g., "I guess she drove too fast. It's no wonder she had an accident").

### Reaction Formation

Turning a negative emotion into a positive one. This is a valiant effort to try to erase the bad feeling by putting your best foot forward (e.g., hug someone when you are really upset with them; smile when you are down).

### Regression

To regress means to go back to an earlier (i.e., more primitive) pattern of coping. For example, perhaps you used to drive fast when under stress. For the most part, you don't do this anymore, but when under high stress, you might regress back to this old behavior.

### Repression

Repression prevents uncomfortable thoughts and concomitant feelings from ever reaching conscious awareness (unlike "suppression"). It is a mechanism that filters out bad stuff and lets into our awareness only acceptable stuff.

### Somaticize

This is the fancy word for "acting in." It means absorbing our emotions inward, with our body, instead of expressing them. As a result, we might get a variety of bodily reactions (e.g., headaches, stomachaches, ulcers, diarrhea, rashes, twitches, etc.).

### Spiritualize

Using spirituality, and spiritual ideas, as a way to "intellectualize" and mask uncomfortable feelings.

### Splitting

Splitting the world into black and white categories (e.g., all good or all bad). Emotions are less messy this way.

### Sublimation

Putting your emotional energy to work. In other words, channeling your upset into constructive work (e.g., cleaning or doing work when you are upset).

### Suppression

Suppressing something means pushing it down, outside of our conscious awareness. It means it became conscious first, then we stuffed it. This is different than "repression" wherein something never reaches conscious awareness.

### Triangulate

Going to a third person (e.g., friend, superior or confidant) to complain about someone in the hopes that they will do something about it so that you don't have to; it is the easy way out.

### Theologize

Using theology and theological ideas as a way to intellectualize and mask uncomfortable feelings.

### Withdraw

Pull away physically or emotionally from the person or situation that is upsetting.



## Step 2. Unguard your heart and open your mind.

Now that you have a handle on your own defenses or coping strategies, reflect upon how you might wish to work with these in discernment. Here are a few suggestions.

### Recognize the value.

It is important to appreciate the fact that pain is necessary for us to mature. This isn't new information, but somehow it is easy to lose sight of this when we are in pain. We just wish it would go away. In order to motivate change, we need pain to push us. In order to attain wisdom and deeper knowledge of life, we need the experience of *working through* our pain. In order to experience compassion and empathy for others, we must know what pain feels like. In order to grieve and give way to new life, we must express the pain of loss. And in order to discern well and open our hearts, we must ache for God's compassion. You don't have to like pain, but before you react hastily and marshal your defenses, recall its value to make you whole and holy.

### Make proactive choices.

If you do not want to react defensively, you will need to know your options. If you recognize that you are defending yourself against some kind of painful truth, ask yourself: Is this something that is wise for me to keep hidden? Would you have more freedom in discernment by opening this issue up or leaving it contained? What will it do for you to make either choice? How might your choice affect others? Explore your options and make a proactive choice.

### Use only what you need when you need it.

Sometimes we use a sledgehammer to kill a fly. We can become so phobic of pain that the slightest hint of pain evokes an all-out war against it. Ease up. You have an arsenal of defenses, so pick and choose what you need. Maybe you can deal with parts of the pain while leaving other parts at bay. Maybe you can compartmentalize the issue for today and choose to deal with it tomorrow when you have the time. Maybe you could share parts of your story with the discerning group, but leave other parts private. Use your defenses in degrees, rather than in an all-or-nothing manner.

### Claim your defenses while in conversation.

If you find yourself becoming defensive while in a conversation, it helps to state your defensive urges and your desires to behave otherwise. If you can name it and claim it aloud you'll have a bit more power over it than if you try to manage your defensive reactions silently. It also will help the person with whom you are interacting appreciate what is going on. If you state your efforts to behave otherwise, they are likely to cut you some slack in recognition of your efforts. For example, say something like, "I have an urge to shut down and I don't want to do that." Or, "I have an urge to argue with you and I don't want to do that. . . ."

### Broaden your repertoire.

Maybe you don't know all the ways that are available to you for coping. Take a lesson from your friends. Perhaps they have discovered some great ways to cope with painful issues

that are effective. Maybe you've never heard of "compartmentalization." Perhaps you've never tried journaling. There are countless ways to cope. Get more creative, broaden your repertoire and you'll have greater flexibility and freedom.

Discernment is an especially graced opportunity to become freer and more open in your response to God's unceasing invitation to new life. In addition to the many processes you might already be using, ease your defenses that conceal your deeper truths and let your soul discover that for which it yearns.

According to the riches of God's glory, may you have the power for your hidden self to grow strong, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith and you may be filled with the utter fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:16-19

## RECOMMENDED READING

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# The Fragmented Self at Prayer

Richard Boileau

*Seize my heart out of its fantasy, direct my heart from the fiction of secrecy.*  
Leonard Cohen, *Book of Mercy*

While the act of praying may be understood from a variety of perspectives, its most striking characteristic is its personal appeal. It addresses God in the second person and is spoken in the first (Wright, 1993).

Prayer is communication—a relational act that, by definition, involves two parties in dialogue. As well, prayer should—to be effective—engage the whole and authentic self. As it is a spiritual act, it should be the expression of “the experience of consciously striving to integrate one’s life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence” (Schneiders, 1986).

Authenticity is a rigorous, never ending process that enables truth-telling and intimacy in communication. According to Bernard Lonergan, S.J., it calls for deliberate adherence to four key principles that are applied at different levels of consciousness, namely attentiveness in sensing, intelligence in understanding, reasonableness in judging and responsibility in deciding (Lonergan, 1979).



Truth-telling in prayer is the unobstructed expression of authenticity. It is proof that a meaningful relationship is established and ground upon which further spiritual development can occur. In this sacred communication, any falseness or inauthenticity—no matter how seemingly insignificant—becomes a barrier to intimacy, an impediment to growth and, therefore, a limitation on the joy that is the fruit of love.

Honest prayer was the focus of a retreat that I attended last summer, under the direction of William Barry, S.J. It was a prelude to his new book, *Praying the Truth* (2012), and the fruit of his insightful work on building a relationship with God that is based on friendship. The experience of learning about the many ways by which we inhibit the development of authentic friendship was for me the starting point of reflection on fragmentation in prayer.

The most compelling of Barry's arguments are that honesty is the bedrock of friendship and that friendship with God humanizes us. With a series of concrete examples, he reveals areas of our lives that we are reticent to divulge to God along with the consequences of withholding those parts of ourselves. He explains the need to be transparent about fears, sadness, pettiness, anger, rage, sexuality and sin. More surprising are suggestions that we even hesitate to talk in prayer about our attraction to God, to celebrate achievements and thank God for them.

Barry paints the portrait of a deeply caring God whose only interest in past patterns of sinfulness is their power to negatively affect the present, hence the importance of reconciliation and the freedom that it provides to act in accordance with the truth and goodness already within us. "Secrecy poisons friendship" inasmuch as it entombs gifts that are meant to be deployed, and to give meaning and joy to our lives. Secrets lock us in tiny prisons.

Truth-telling in prayer is a matter of telling the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It is also a question of listening with a pure heart and mind, meaning with humility that acknowledges victories and failures with

transparency. False humility, which in effect is the denial of God's gifts to us, is as much the enemy of truth as is our denial of sin.

Each of us deviates from this standard of truth-telling to some degree. Most often, distortions in communication with God are the inadvertent consequences of not understanding how our particular psycho-spiritual mechanisms work. When these mechanisms take over, wounded and fragmented parts control the content of prayer.

This tendency applies to everyone, director and directee included. To acknowledge this reality is important. It enables development in both parties and fosters compassion, which is a necessary ingredient of effective mentoring.

Telling the whole truth is difficult. Everyone is selective about what they reveal. Telling nothing but the truth is challenging also. We often wrap truth in extraneous facts to paint a misleading picture—even though we know that God is never misled. When we do, we squander an opportunity for meaningful dialogue with God, and for healing.

Also, we often pray in a manner that indicates an expectation because we are afraid of the unknown or of certain dreaded possibilities. We then use pious words of worship or thanksgiving precisely to avoid the raw words that express despair, anger and other disturbing feelings. The degree of spiritual nakedness and existential angst that we find in the psalms, for instance, frightens us because it would expose the vulnerability or doubt that we dare not acknowledge.

Because we all have experienced from the earliest stages of life that this world can be a brutal and threatening place, our mind weaves strategies—often unconsciously—to avoid pain and alleviate anxiety. And because these harsh realities tend to affect our image of God, our psychological strategies often apply to our spiritual life as well.

Barry ends his book *Friendship Like No Other* (2008) with the warning that what Saint Ignatius calls the enemy of human nature zeros in on our weaknesses to drive a wedge between us and God. It would be naive to think of sin as merely a matter of morality. What we

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and nothing but  
the truth.**



have done wrong and what virtue we have failed to practice are very often the effects of fear.

In working toward greater authenticity in a directee's prayer, what we seek to achieve is transformation, which very often occurs as a result of insight into the dynamic of internal systems. We seek healing because hidden wounds are barriers to intimacy inasmuch as they trigger fear, and fear repels love.

THE DYNAMIC OF  
SUB-PERSONALITIES

Telling the whole truth and nothing but the truth in prayer is a challenge because some fragile parts of ourselves are hidden from view by unconscious protective strategies. Other parts are hidden because if they were revealed they would elicit too much regret, anger or shame.

Consequently, rather than abandon ourselves wholly to God's love, fear causes the fragmentation of the self and the hiding of critical parts. Even though we know the patient cannot heal without relating to the physician the symptoms of illness, we do not allow ourselves to confess to God the specific array of factors that contribute to our spiritual dis-ease. Yet, "nothing is meaningful as long as we perceive only separate fragments" (Ferrucci, 2004, p. 22).

Other words for these fragments are parts or sub-personalities: "Sub-personalities are psychological satellites, coexisting as a multitude of lives within the overall medium of our personality. Each sub-personality has a style and a motivation of its own, often strikingly dissimilar from those of the others" (Ferrucci, 47). The process of integration, both spiritually and psychologically, is to bring these disparate parts under the control of the will or the personal self. "In the early stages of human development, awareness of the self is nonexistent. For most of us, it now exists in a more or less veiled and confused way. Our task is to gain experience of it in its pure state as the personal self" (Ferrucci, 45).

Typically, we act or behave as fragments—as parts that operate instinctively, sometimes in concert with co-conspiring parts—rather than as a

whole set of parts orchestrated under the leadership of an unfettered will. Certain parts dominate while others recede according to changing patterns in response to a wide variety of life circumstances.

To a lesser or greater degree, we all tend to vacillate between fragments of our self through a complex theatre of opaque emotions, unguided impulses and inspired desires. In some cases, sub-personalities in prayer can create the illusion of spiritual movement rather than real progress. What we might regard as insights gained in prayer can be little more than partial or distorted hearing of God's gentle whisper that is easily overwhelmed by the cacophony of competing sub-personalities. For example, a wounded part may seek comfort in acts that another part regards as shameful with yet another part dismissing the moralizing part as foolish. Each part has its origins in the isolated judgements of others, either secular or religious, that have been internalized.

As certain sub-personalities dominate, particularly those that serve as sentinels to protect deeply wounded parts, the echoing sounds of toxic inner tapes are erroneously taken to be the voice of God. Schwartz refers to categories of sub-personalities that distort our conscious understanding of the self because they act rather automatically to threats.

Hidden or exiled parts are "the most sensitive members of the system. When injured or outraged, the members of this group will be imprisoned by [managing parts] for their own and the large system's protection." Others are "strategic and interested in controlling the environment to keep things safe," while yet others "react powerfully and automatically when exiles are upset, to try to stifle or smother those feelings" (Schwartz, p. 46).

The psychological approach to sub-personalities was developed by Roberto Assagioli, a contemporary of Freud and Jung. It became known as psychosynthesis, which has its detractors. Some criticisms are well-founded but the theory does offer an interpretation of inconsistent human understanding and behaviour that is helpful in dealing with particular

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situations, especially in relationships. However we interpret this multiplicity in a person, some account must be made of it. I chose to apply Assagioli's concepts, with some reservations, to the realm of prayer.

Once attuned to the phenomenon, it is relatively easy to notice that directees exhibit not a single persona or a consistent set of values but a fragmented set that comprises a family of identities that are developed and adjusted according to the multiple environments in which they operate. Very often, shifts from one persona to another occur unconsciously. When they do, the person loses a degree of control over his or her responses.

Sub-personalities affect our perception of events and often offer false comfort because they are constructed precisely to mask vulnerability. When sub-personalities conflict, however, they cause confusion or anguish. The goal, therefore, is to unify them around the true and unique identity vested by God, the name by which God calls each individual.

This process operates through five stages: recognition, acceptance, coordination, integration and synthesis.

Dominant sub-personalities reveal themselves to the simplest introspection, although subordinated ones are less conspicuous. . . . The acceptance of sub-personalities is necessary in order to change or eliminate what is negative in them and accentuate what is positive. . . . Coordination requires a sound understanding of a sub-personality and what lies behind it. . . . Integration uses all of these techniques to adjust particular sub-personalities so as to foster functional relationships between them as well as favourable outcomes for each. . . . Synthesis results in the emergence of the transcended self in a manner that establishes a new foundation for interactions with others (Boileau, 2009, p. 31-32).

I refer here to this theory not in its psychological dimension but rather with regard to its implications in prayer

and spiritual direction. Piero Ferrucci points in the ideal to "a rigorous personal nakedness which allows the self to shine through, without impediments." He imagines spirituality as an activity that promotes integrity: "Spirituality in its fullest significance, of course, can be seen as the synthesis of all aspects and possibilities" (Ferrucci, 202).

As humans are incarnated spirits, all internal systems are connected, whether we choose to treat them as interdependent or not: thoughts, feelings and the physical body. As a spiritual director, I keenly observe how systems succeed each other in dealing with restlessness, which, as Saint Augustine points out, is the yardstick of our distance from God. Whereas in childhood, as neuro-systems developed, dis-ease was first felt in the body, then by the emotions and finally by the intellect, as we get older, layers are added to this fragmented foundation, often in reverse sequence.

In adulthood, reflecting on the relentless bombardment of new and often conflicting data, our mind is often the first to suspect that a deviation from our true identity and mission exists, but circumstances make it altogether too difficult to pursue these thoughts in depth. Then, often in midlife, we experience emotional anguish that echoes notions that were previously discarded for reasons of expediency. But feelings too can be ignored, particularly if they take us beyond our zone of comfort. Later in life, however, the body shouts into our deafness, sometimes in the form of illness. This warning is harder to ignore but we can still manage to rationalize our way around the inevitable truths of our calling, gifts and mission.

Evidence shows that the more harmonious these systems are the more truthful and fruitful the dialogue between us and God can be. The mind, heart and body, which should operate symbiotically, are weakened by division. We may be encouraged that any restoration of integrity in thought patterns can be translated into harmony of feelings and balance in physical systems because they are interdependent. We can start virtually anywhere to heal and strengthen vital systems,



the ultimate expression of which is authenticity in prayer.

In using sub-personality theory in spiritual direction, I have benefited from the insight of internal family therapy as a means of engaging sometimes disparate parts in a safe and constructive process of coordination. The effective onset of coordination creates an experience that promotes trust and encourages the further recognition and acceptance of more fragile parts. Progressively, integration and synthesis occur as more parts are brought into conscious view.

#### INTEGRATION BY THE AFFIRMATIVE PATH

The internal family system model, which was conceived in the 1970s to deal with dynamics between members of a family, was fascinatingly applied some twenty years later by Richard Schwartz to the polarized parts of a single person. Its value in spiritual direction is that IFS hinges on the fact that it is

nonpathologizing and enjoyable. It is nonpathologizing in that people are viewed as having all the resources they need, rather than as having a disease or deficit. Instead of lacking resources, people are seen as being constrained from using innate strengths by polarizing relationships both within themselves and with the people around them (Schwartz, 1995, p. 9).

It has been my experience that people respond very well in spiritual direction when the emphasis is placed on the deployment of their natural gifts rather than focus on sin or even woundedness. Negative aspects are then allowed to emerge as matter for conversion in the pursuit of authentic meaning and joy. When they come to realize that God has vested them with gifts necessary to their mission, which in turn is the fulfilment of their unique spiritual identity, they lighten up, both literally and figuratively. They feel grounded and purposed. Healing then becomes the by-product of free and loving action that stems from a personal

call; it is not the outcome of forensic introspection. "The cue to cure is self-transcendence" (Frankl, 1984, p. 152) because, as we will see later, meaning resides in the higher self.

Authenticity in prayer is self-transcendence that engages the whole integrated person, not disaggregated fragments or just those parts that are managing or protecting vulnerable fragments through unconscious mechanisms. There can be no locked doors in our heart if prayer is to be truly efficacious.

Ideally, all these parts should be controlled by the will, or what Roberto Assagioli called the "personal self." Beyond the personal self is what he called the transpersonal self, which is the realm of the divine, the fountainhead of meaning, which is inevitably reduced or deformed by past experiences. The goal of direction, therefore, is to assist in the process of integration of the personal self with a view to transcending the personal self toward the higher self, God's Spirit within.

Actions that are governed by an independent will, the fruit of sound discernment and free decision-making, propell the person toward that goal. This calls to my mind the situation of a directee whose public personas all appeared genuinely well adjusted. Her faith community in particular thought her to be prayerful, charitable and eternally optimistic. Yet she often described to me private moments as sad. After a time, and an increase in trust, she remarked that her sadness had transformed into anger. I assume that by then she felt safe enough to deflect anger away from herself toward the real cause of her emotional suffering.

Previously, prayer had seemed ineffective in dealing with her deepest suffering. It was during the process of naming, appropriating and deploying her gifts that her sadness began to lift, only to reveal deep-seated anger. The open expression of anger was not allowed in her family of origin. Sadness, on the other hand, was tolerated but only in small doses. As a result, she denied herself the opportunity to express to others either sadness or anger. Only when she was alone would





the sadness surface, to be later revealed as a mask for anger or outrage at the injustices to which she had been subjected.

With direction, her gifts turned her life around—not obsession about wounds but a simple acknowledgement of wounds on the way as gifts blossomed. In essence, the process of discovering her God-given gifts shone a spotlight on the cast of characters and their interplay in the drama of her life. Brutal rejection of her gifts at an early age had caused deep pain. Now, the progressive recognition of these gifts could slowly reveal the exiled parts that would be treated with compassion in the process of synthesis by a liberated will.

As we are not therapists, there are limits to dealing frontally with troublesome sub-personalities in spiritual direction. The primary strategy at our disposal is to help the directee to learn to recognize and avoid circumstances that trigger an undesired response from an affected part, and to do so in prayer, acknowledging their incapacity to handle the situation responsibly. Everyone should learn their limits and avoid approaching them.

The alternate strategy for prayer is to deal directly with a sub-personality at risk when the situation cannot be averted. The trick here is to avoid the normal response of suppressing that part out of shame or fear. This is precisely where its power lies when it recoils from the denial of its legitimate needs. Rather, in prayer, the directee should be invited to engage this part in loving dialogue with God as witness and then allow the will to compassionately

embrace this part, providing it with the acceptance and security that it craves.

In all cases, the objective is to enable the will to take charge of behavior, thereby deactivating the automatic mechanisms of defensive parts. This is never done once for all. Sub-personalities live as long as we do. They always have the potential to wreak havoc if the will does not remain alert. Mercifully, God is faithful, always sustaining a link through the higher self (Assagioli, 2007).

Note that the phenomenon of fragmentation applies not only to the directee in prayer but also to the director in accompaniment; hence, the need for supervision. Indeed Schwartz warns of the challenges faced by the therapist that would apply equally to spiritual directors. These pertain to insecurity, lack of trust in the person being accompanied, lack of understanding of the dynamic of certain parts in the directee and, most especially, the impulsive actions of unbridled parts in the director's complex make-up (Schwartz, 1995).

#### PRAYER OF A UNIFIED BODY, MIND AND HEART

We are by nature story-tellers. Narrative is another word for synthesis, the integration of fragments of experience and partial responses to ever-changing circumstances. We strive as best we can to make coherent the story of our lives. Parts are accepted, contradictions are faced, first with hesitation or ambivalence, and then

conflicted parts are coordinated with confidence as fresh foundations are established. Along the quest for meaning, we accept that narratives, as necessary as they are to wellbeing, are always incomplete. Authentic narratives only point to ultimate truth. But we also discover that this relentless pursuit is the very essence and energy of a life that we call meaningful.

The whole truth and nothing but the truth in relationship with God requires an expansion of consciousness. With more content brought into the light, we may pray more authentically and act more intentionally, ethically and responsibly: "Being human is being conscious and being responsible, culminating in a synthesis of both. . . . Man's responsibility reaches down into an unconscious ground (Frankl, 2000, p. 67). Indeed, "authentic existence is present where a self is deciding for itself, but not where an id is driving it" (Frankl, 2000, p. 32). The same may be said about prayer.

Loneragan reflected a great deal on the nature of authenticity and the process of integration in the context of human development. While I find no evidence that Lonergan was familiar with sub-personality theory per se, he does allude in *Insight* to layers of complexity. "While the dramatic patterns of one person dealing with other persons draws upon all one's resources, still it subdivides, like the successive coatings in an onion, into a series of zones from the ego or *moi intime* to the outer rind of the persona" (Loneragan, 1992, p. 495).





Loneragan reminds us that any human action (I include prayer) can involve several components simultaneously though not necessarily in a harmonious or insightful manner. Rather, he argues that intellectual insight is a result of psychic integration, which in turn is an outcome of organic integration.

The initiative of development may be organic, psychic, intellectual, or external, but the development remains fragmentary until the principle of correspondence between different levels is satisfied. . . . The initiative may be psychic, for man's sensitivity not only reflects and integrates its biological basis but also is itself an entity, a value, a living and developing. . . . The initiative may be intellectual; its source is a problem; one is out to understand, to judge, to decide, to chose (Loneragan, 1992, p. 496).

Integration is necessary for true spiritual development to occur and maturity to be achieved. Fragmentation is always a limitation both in the development and communication of spirituality. As prayer is a communication, it remains riddled with elements of inauthenticity to the extent that fragmentation is operative. So fragmentation is also a limitation in the movement of self-transcendence that fires the human heart.

Saint Paul points to this difficulty in praying from the unconscious, not-yet-fully-integrated self: "The Spirit help us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words" (Romans 8:26). God as Trinity, being the very essence of unity, graciously helps to unify the fragmentary and hidden content of our unconscious self.

But it remains an instinct in us all to rely on our own wit in prayer. So we gather together our offering as best we can. Sub-personalities that have learned to manage weakness take the lead role. In ideal circumstances, some vulnerable parts are revealed but almost always only partially (not the whole truth) or these parts are accompanied by distracting parts (rather than confessing nothing but the truth).

A constructive approach for directees is to lay bare to God these wounded parts as they become aware of them, and to stay in communication with God long enough to hear and respond to God's ~~healing~~ counsel in a truly dialogical manner. Sometimes that means telling God that we are not ready to follow his counsel or that we are unable to implement it in quite the way that God would recommend.

Barry's latest book is very helpful in this regard. In a chapter entitled "Expressing Disagreement with God," he urges readers to express their true thoughts and feelings in regard to Scripture passages or devotional prayers that present an image of God or human nature that should be challenged. He encourages them to express doubts frankly and, if necessary, to disagree with God as the psalmists did when such a contrary opinion spoke the truth of their disposition of heart at a particular moment in time (Barry, 2012).

Truth in prayer can be uncomfortable. To achieve authenticity, a directee must be gently encouraged to journey into the mystery of hidden parts of their being in order to discover their true identity, their God-given gifts and to hear the still small voice that calls them to higher ground, on a journey that transcends protective barriers. The task of directors and counsellors is to assist in this process by establishing a relationship of mutual faith, hope and love that is rooted in the life of the Trinity.

In so doing, each awareness of inauthenticity; each integration of a fragmented part of the self; each act of a conscious will can draw directees closer to liberating truth. When we assist others in striving in these ways toward the higher self, we enable a meaningful relationship with God that with grace and perseverance, deepens our communion and joy.

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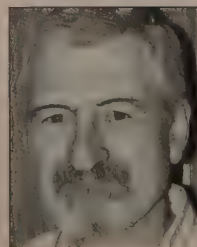
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*Coping with Loss:*  
Experiences of Women Religious

Donna M. Kelley, I.H.M., Psy.D.





“Jesus, give me the grace to get through this!” As I stepped into a car with several family members, I silently repeated this prayer, wishfully hoping the news was a mistake and my sister would be alive when we reached her home. Thus began my first experience with grief, not realizing what the process would entail or how familiar it would become in the years that followed. Over the years, as I reflected on my experiences of loss, shared in the grief of my family, and journeyed with other bereaved women

religious, I struggled to make sense of death. In my attempt to understand this process, I found helpful and comforting writings that addressed grief from a spiritual vantage point, such as Joyce Rupp’s *Praying Our Goodbyes*. I also found research studies on bereavement enlightening, but I desired to read works that specifically focused on the bereavement process in women religious. My search, however, was unsuccessful.

Eventually, I had the opportunity to conduct my own research examining the

influence of spirituality, social support and extraversion on grief symptoms in women religious. I was encouraged at the positive reception my initiative received from various active congregations and contemplative communities. Of the 93 women religious across the United States who responded to the surveys I sent, 82 of the women met the criteria to participate. Forty-eight of them were members of five active congregations and 34 were members of 17 contemplative monasteries. In addition to completing measures



evaluating the above variables of interest, many of the women chose to submit written narrative descriptions of their bereavement experiences. These inspirational messages addressed the role of faith in grief, the necessity to talk about loss, and the need for research in the area of grief and women religious. This paper will examine the narrative responses of the women religious in the context of several statistical findings of this study.

## OVERALL FINDINGS

### *Social Support*

Overall, several similarities emerged between the active and contemplative groups. In general, whether the women religious lived alone, in small groups or in larger communities, they expressed satisfaction with the support offered to them by family members, community members and friends. This finding is further attested to by the written comments of several active women religious who reported feeling supported by their community and friends. Similarly, some contemplatives also reported that they found comfort in the expressions of support and concern extended to them from other contemplative communities in their area. Surprisingly, statistical analyses did not show a relation between social support and grief across the sample as a whole. This finding may be due to several factors. For example, the structure of religious life may influence how women religious use their social support networks effectively during periods of bereavement. For instance, in some situations, women religious are restricted from contacting their social support network. This is verified by one contemplative woman religious who wrote "Our life is different in that most of our inner struggles are private. We do not have much time to speak with one another and so early on, I learned to sort through my feelings, thoughts and problems by myself." Conversely, other contemplatives reported finding comfort and support in visits from family and friends and in talking with those women religious who experienced a similar loss. Several contemplatives, however, shared that they rarely saw their family or friends; therefore, their social support was limited to emotional

support from phone calls and/or emails. In addition, contemplative women reported feeling hurt because their community didn't talk as a group about the loss that they had experienced. One contemplative wrote, "We never comforted each other. . . . We were (are) all hurting to some degree or other; but we never mentioned anything as a group. . . ."

Furthermore, the time constraints of ministry, community obligations, or family responsibilities may hinder women religious from taking advantage of their support system. As one active woman religious clearly wrote, "Because women religious are people of faith, it is assumed that [after a death], we just pick up the pieces . . . surrender, and you're over it. Externally, we have to . . . but it takes a huge interior toll." In addition, several active and contemplative women religious reported that they may have postponed dealing with their grief because they lacked the necessary time to reflect on the loss due to community and/or family responsibilities. One woman religious expressed it this way, "We bury our dead, but we do not mourn [them]." Another wrote, "I felt quite resentful like I wasn't given the [time] or space to grieve or process the death." In addition, an active woman religious reported that due to her community obligations, she had no time or place to grieve; therefore, she resigned from her job and took time for herself.

### *Spirituality*

All of the women religious in this study experienced high levels of spirituality. Surprisingly, though, spirituality did not appear to be related to grief resolution in the same way for the group as a whole. In fact, differences in spirituality appeared to be related to differences in grief resolution for the active group, but not for the contemplative group. The narrative stories, however, more consistently indicated that spirituality played an important role in the grief process for many of the women religious. While both active and contemplative women acknowledged the pain of the loss, they wrote that their faith and belief in eternal life were sources of strength, comfort and peace. Some women stated that they could never cope without God. One active woman religious wrote

"grief and supporting others can be overwhelming. Faith helps me through the process." Other women found comfort in the belief that the deceased was interceding for them from heaven, as one contemplative who wrote, "I pray to them daily asking them to help me. . . . I feel very close to them—almost closer now than when they were alive." The sentiments of many of the women religious appear to be summed up in the words of this contemplative who wrote, "I miss my mother terribly. . . . I am grateful for the gift of faith. I know that she is in God's arms. I am at peace. . . . Sometimes I am lonely and I grieve greatly for her presence and her love, but . . . I see that God wants me to draw nearer to him."

In addition, in some instances women religious viewed the death of a loved one as a blessing, because the deceased was released from his or her suffering. Often, women religious regarded heaven as a reward for a life of dedication to God. Furthermore, they looked forward to one day being reunited with their loved ones in heaven. Several of the women found consolation in receiving signs that their loved ones were in heaven or from experiencing the presence of the deceased. One active woman religious wrote, "One morning I was overcome by a grief so intense and couldn't settle down. . . . I then heard my father's voice (in my head or heart) telling me to work with him that day. . . . I believe that he helped me with a successful [project]. Since then I sense more than ever his presence . . . it is so real for me. I feel that he is telling me to live peacefully and happily. I'm okay."

For the women religious who experienced tragic losses, their spirituality affected them differently. Several of them reported that their faith stirred concern and anxiety for the salvation of the deceased. In particular, this was the case when the loss came as a consequence of violence such as a murder or suicide. Based on past research indicating that, at times, spirituality may lead to a crisis of faith following the loss of a significant other, this reaction is common and often deepens a person's faith.

### *Personality*

Experts suggest that the ability to cope with grief and the resolution of grief may be associated with the



personality of the bereaved. One factor examined in this research was the influence that extraversion has on the grief process in women religious. In terms of personality, the active women religious were more extraverted in general than the contemplative women religious. This seems to fit with the nature of both active and contemplative communities. Furthermore, a trend appeared in this study suggesting that the active women religious who were more extraverted also had fewer grief symptoms, and the contemplative women who were more introverted had fewer grief symptoms, indicating that a "good fit" between the personality of a woman religious and her community makes the grief process easier to bear.

The possibility of differences in the relationship between personality and grief in active and contemplative women religious also appears in several of their narrative comments. In the second data collection, a contemplative woman wrote "Even though we haven't talked as a community . . . I feel that I am . . . slowly recovering." Furthermore, several contemplatives wrote that they miss the support and the opportunity to talk with the deceased. In fact, another contemplative woman religious shared that she would find it helpful if her community spoke more frequently about their deceased member. Moreover, several of the active women religious wrote that they found comfort in talking and crying with other family members. Touchingly, one active woman religious wrote, "This was our first Christmas without my sister. [Our] family gathered together and we had a wonderful time crying and laughing . . . while we retold the funny and beautiful episodes of [our] growing up. It was an unexpectedly rewarding time." Sadly, a number of other active women religious reported that they continue to miss the person intensely, often think of the deceased, and would love to talk with them.

### *Stories of Grief*

In many of their written personal reflections, the women religious disclosed painful, beautiful and intimate testimonies of grief. Several of the women wrote that as they shared their stories "tears were streaming down their faces." Other women expressed an inability to cry, a desire to grieve

through tears, and/or a sense that tears of grief were considered inappropriate in the religious life.

Many of the women religious wrote openly of a loving and close relationship with the deceased individual. At times, the women described long-time friendships and intense heartaches due to the loss. They especially missed the support and affection of the deceased, as well as the opportunity to share intimately with them, resulting in feelings of loneliness that were acknowledged by the women. Others described their experience of caring for the deceased during their final illness, which for many necessitated living for several years away from their religious communities. For these women, a cherished bond developed with the dying person as they became closer and more connected to them. In addition, several others expressed how the loss of a sibling changed their family system and led them to face their own mortality.

At times the women expressed feelings of regret for a relationship that never fully developed as a consequence of entering religious life at a young age. Others reported feelings of guilt for not being present at the time of death or not being able to attend the funeral. Furthermore, other women expressed regret for not having the ability to ease the physical pain and torment of the dying person.

Several women shared experiences of complicated grief due to experiences with suicide, murder, or multiple losses within a short time span. These women expressed feelings of confusion, anger, resentment, fear and/or an awareness of the violence within themselves. An additional issue that also complicated grief was conveyed by women who shortly after their loss were themselves diagnosed with a serious physical illness. One active woman religious wrote, "I was completely floored by the diagnosis . . . What was most difficult for me was returning to the same doctors that my [parent] had been to."

### *Easing the Grief Process*

As I reflected on these personal stories of grief, I was touched by the deep strength, the difficult struggle, and the spiritual journeys many of the women religious were going through, often with help from others, and

*A "good fit" between the personality of a woman religious and her community makes the grief process easier to bear.*





sometimes alone with God. Their personal stories shared a common thread of deep faith, intense pain, heartbreak, loneliness, a struggle to make sense of loss, and a strength that comes from union with God. Obviously, women religious are not excluded from the grief experienced by the death of a loved one. Furthermore, research with other groups indicates, and the personal stories of grief in this study suggest, that grief does not last for a specific length of time. After several months or years, although a woman religious may appear to function at her pre-loss level, episodes of grief may reoccur from time to time, typically around significant dates such as birthdays, holidays or the anniversary of the death. Research indicates that when loss is not addressed, the bereaved may become enveloped in depression and anger. However, when grief is acknowledged and faced, it can lead to inner strength and a new self-understanding. For bereaved women religious and their communities, this grief study suggests that during periods of bereavement, a more effective use of a social support network, a keener focus on spiritual well-being and a clearer understanding of the grieving woman's personality may be valuable tools for women religious to utilize.

In regard to social support, as mentioned above, many of the women religious appeared to have a support system in place and expressed satisfaction with it. Therefore, during periods of grief, it may be helpful if women religious make a conscious effort to engage their support system more

effectively. Previous research indicates that emotional support can soothe the pain associated with loss. For women religious, this involves frequent visits with family and/or friends who understand the bereaved woman's relationship with the deceased and who are capable of extending a listening ear to her. Within religious communities, emotional support may be demonstrated through continued expressions of concern and interest for the bereaved woman including sympathetic words, thoughtful deeds, and a sensitivity to the loss months after the death has occurred and particularly around important "anniversary" dates.

Furthermore, an awareness that the pain associated with grief may persist months after the loss occurred may remind community members and congregational leadership to provide the bereaved woman with continued support. Several practical ways to extend this support are with phone calls, visits, and/or written notes. Outreach may be offered simply through a compassionate word, taking time to listen, and realizing that grief continues long after the death. In addition, the bereaved woman religious and her community may benefit from understanding that grief is unique for each woman religious and therefore each grief journey, just like each spiritual journey, will be unique. Since she may be the only person in her local community who recently lost a loved one and she does not have a partner or children of her own with whom she can share intimate memories, a bereaved woman religious may need to

initiate contact with friends or family members. This may entail planning phone calls, arranging visits, sharing feelings with those who care, or simply asking for support when it isn't offered.

Continued openness between those who grieve and those in supportive positions is a key factor in resolving grief. Another important point of consideration is that grief may require a period of counseling. Often grief stirs up many other emotions. This may be particularly true when the bereaved experienced a tragic loss, multiple losses, or the death of a close person. Grief counseling can support the person through this "normal" period of unavoidable pain. Both congregational leadership and community members can help to normalize grief in religious communities by recognizing that grief may necessitate extra assistance and realizing that grief counseling is not an unusual necessity. One possible way to do this is by making grief counseling easily available to bereaved community members.

An additional issue of importance is spirituality, which previous researchers explain as a relationship with God and a search for meaning in life. Spirituality is the essence of a woman religious's life; therefore, it would likely play an important function in the grief process. As expected, the women religious in this study have high levels of spirituality, and their written passages suggest that their faith and religious beliefs were sources of comfort. Based on previous research findings, however, the relationship between spirituality and grief is complex and varied



for different people. Past research indicates that spirituality may help the bereavement process at times, but in other cases grief results in a spiritual crisis that ultimately may lead to a new self-understanding. This complex pattern seems to hold true for women religious.

It may be beneficial for women religious and those close to them to focus on their loss in terms of grief and spirituality. This involves viewing spirituality as a source of strength and maintaining a conscious awareness of where God is in their grief process. Women religious may need assistance in understanding and integrating the pain associated with the loss and the consolation that stems from their faith and relationship with God. For these reasons, it would be important for bereaved women religious who are having particular difficulty to seek out counselors skilled in addressing various facets of spirituality including spiritual coping, search for meaning, perception of God, and spiritual experiences. In addition, women religious may profit from working with counselors who are aware of and sensitive to the various ways that spirituality may influence the grief process for them. Furthermore, they also may benefit from exploring with supportive friends, counselors or spiritual directors the impact that coping styles, personality factors, and the overall structure of religious life have on the grief process.

Interestingly, personality factors also may influence the grief process; therefore, an understanding of her individual personality style may benefit a bereaved woman religious. For example, an extraverted grieving woman religious may tend to seek social support outside of her local house, look for distractions from her pain, and express more visible grieving emotions. Contrary to this, an introverted woman religious may be more satisfied with the social support received from a smaller circle of contacts within her local community, be more in touch with her emotions, be less expressive of these emotions, and seek more time alone than an extraverted woman religious. In times of grief, extraverted women religious may rely more on social support than do introverted women religious. During periods of bereavement, the limitations imposed on social support by the structure of the contemplative lifestyle may hinder the

grief process for extraverted contemplative women. This may suggest that for bereaved extraverted women religious, regardless of their particular religious lifestyle, more contact with other people may help grief resolution. Extraverted women religious may need to speak more often to others about their grief or seek distance from their pain through visits or phone calls. On the other hand, introverted women religious may benefit more from journaling about their pain and from periods of intensive self-reflection.

In their personal grief reflections, several active and contemplative women religious expressed gratitude for this grief study and conveyed that they felt honored to participate in it. Furthermore, they stated that there was a strong need for this type of research and echoed a hope that it would benefit others. Most importantly, the women shared that it was helpful for them to express their feelings through writing and completing the surveys. The opinion of many of the women religious appears to resonate in the voice of this one who wrote, "Grief in women religious is a long-neglected area." Not every woman religious contacted, however, was able to express her feelings of grief. A few active and contemplative women shared that they were unable to participate in the study because their grief was too intense. These sentiments further indicate the acute pain experienced by grieving women religious. Like Jesus who wept at the tomb of his friend Lazarus, bereaved women religious shed tears for their deceased loved ones, seek comfort in the supportive presence of others, and call out to their loving heavenly Father who sees their broken hearts, hears their prayers, and eases their burdens. May they find hope in the words of Jesus who declared in his Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are they who mourn: for they will be comforted" (Matthew 5:4).

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# Collaboration



## Between the Marke

**O**n February 9, 2009, the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Very Reverend Adolfo Nicolas, S.J., gave the Mission Day keynote address at Loyola Marymount University in which he challenged his brother Jesuits to specific, concrete collaboration and an "expansion of lay apostolic leadership." In referring to the decisions of their General Chapter of 1995, he reminded Jesuits that they are "to foster an attitude of readiness to cooperate, to listen attentively, and to learn

from others." He further advised them to focus on their "on-going formation, so that they might . . . face together the difficulties of genuine collaboration." He provided a new paradigm for their apostolic approach. He said that the question is no longer, "How can lay women and men assist Jesuits in their ministry?" The new question, he declared, is, "How can Jesuits serve lay women and men in *their* ministries?"

This challenge of Fr. Nicolas should be the vision for anyone in





# Place and the Church

Carroll Juliano, S.H.C.J.

Loughlan Sofield, S.T.

church leadership today. A few years ago we interviewed the oldest retired archbishops in the United States, inviting them to identify the most pressing needs in the church in the United States, tapping their wisdom to provide directions for the church today. Each of them identified the same issue: getting serious about incorporating more fully the gifts of the laity.

Cardinal Mahony, in an insightful and prophetic pastoral, *As I Have Done for You*, concluded by declaring that the church of the new millennium must be

more inclusive and more collaborative. His call to greater collaboration reflects what the church has been claiming for many years. Collaboration is predicated on the fact that everyone created by God has been given gifts for the sake of fostering the mission of Jesus Christ. Some have restricted this by merely looking to those gifts present within the church. The challenge is to see the variety and vastness of the gifts present within the larger community. Clearly the church has much to offer to the world, but it is also true that

leaders, such as those in the business and civic community, have much to offer the church.

In this article we offer four examples of this vast variety of gifts found in the world: 1) an organization which exists to bring to the church the insights and wisdom of leaders in the business world and other institutions; 2) an article which focuses on the implications of the various cohorts who work side by side in today's marketplace; 3) a book on collaboration in the workplace, and 4) a project focused on tapping the



wisdom of Christian leaders in the workplace. Each of these assists us in discovering ways, as Fr. Nicolas said, "to listen attentively and to learn from others."

### Example One

The National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management has tapped into the wisdom of Catholic business, military and civic leaders to share that knowledge and experience with church leaders. The Roundtable leaders constitute a network of Catholic CEOs and senior executives who believe it is incumbent upon them to share their God-given gifts in administration, finance, personnel and facilities with their counterparts in the institutional church. While acknowledging that the church is not a company or a corporation, they are also convinced that their knowledge can provide expertise to church leaders in areas that often cause problems and stress for church leaders. In dialog with theologians and canon lawyers they have developed a number of creative tools that can be used by all church leaders at the diocesan, educational, parish and institutional levels.

They have, based on their experience, developed Catholic standards for excellence, a stewardship and accountability code that has application for all church leaders. Also, recognizing the need for clear job expectations in the Catholic community, the Leadership Roundtable worked with human resource experts to create job descriptions for twenty top diocesan positions. They are committed to developing creative, faith-based, canonically sound solutions to the temporal issues that sometimes challenge church leaders.

The more the wisdom of church and business leaders is approached in a spirit of collaboration, the greater the likelihood we can transform this world into a just and holy place. There is need for a more sustained and explicit effort on the part of church leaders to tap the unique gifts that these business leaders have. One of the greatest untapped resources available to the church is individuals who have recently left the workforce, or those experiencing a call from God to work in and for the church. In some cases these are people looking

for employment. Others are prepared, if asked, to offer their wisdom and skills to the church in a voluntary capacity. It appears that much of this giftedness, skill and generosity is being lost to the church because there is little effort by church leaders to tap this resource.

The most effective diocesan pastoral planning we have experienced is in a diocese that hired a deeply faith-filled, extremely competent individual to lead the planning. He had been the CEO of a company that did planning in more than forty countries. Two of his peers offered to serve in an advisory capacity on the diocesan planning commission, and they were joined by the retired vice president of planning and policy for a state university who joined the team as a volunteer when personally invited. The results were spectacular.

### Example Two

A recent article by Jennifer Nalewicki focused on a number of issues that are affecting the business world and that also have great relevance for those in ministry. As you focus on her observations, consider the implications for both ministry and especially for the initial and ongoing formation of ministers. Her insights are based on research undertaken at such institutions as Boston College Center on Aging and Work, and the American Society for Training and Development.

Nalewicki contextualizes her insights about what is happening in the workplace today within two demographic realities. First, in the next two decades, 77 million Baby Boomers are projected to leave the workforce. Second, only 46 million new individuals will enter as their replacements. Does that sound similar to what we are experiencing in the situation of vocations to the priesthood and religious life? The church is experiencing a new reality. At the same time that we are experiencing this decrease in priests and religious, we are experiencing a dramatic increase in the number of ecclesial lay ministers and permanent deacons. Rather than bemoan the absence of Baby Boomers in the workplace, Nalewicki looks to the assets and skills that their replacements bring and searches for creative ways to maximize this reality. What approach has the church taken to respond to the decrease in the number of priests and

religious? Is more time spent lamenting the diminishment than seeking creative solutions to our current situation? While training as family therapists we were encouraged to focus more on the health than the pathology. This principle holds true in this situation. Much would be accomplished if more time was spent looking at the health and giftedness of the "new ministers" that God is offering rather than mourning the loss of priestly and religious life vocations.

One of the recommendations offered by Nalewicki is to establish a method for formal mentorship or apprenticeship for those coming into the work (ministry) force. This concept of mentoring is not a new concept in church circles. It has been initiated by some dioceses and religious congregations. However, it is still not the norm in many ministerial settings.

We have observed some creative applications of this concept of mentorship in some dioceses. The Diocese of Portsmouth in England, under the prophetic leadership at the time of Bishop Crispian Hollis, required all new pastors and pastors in transition to obtain professional supervision, in addition to the mentoring they were receiving from their brother priests. Supervision was also available to any priest who desired it. The supervision was paid for by the diocese and the parish. His long experience as a pastoral leader had convinced Archbishop Hollis of the absolute need for this.

In rereading the manuscript for our most recent book, *Principled Ministry: A Guidebook for Catholic Church Leaders*, we were stuck by the number of times we had counseled the readers to seek supervision or consultation. Mentoring, supervision, consultation or apprenticeship has long been the established norm in many professions. It is our hope that it will also be the norm for all in ministry.

Nalewicki indicates that the present situation may result in a number of outcomes. Those leaving the workplace may leave a skill gap behind, with their replacements not possessing the right knowledge, skills and abilities; the newer employees may not fully understand the company culture; and, the depressed economy has led to a failure to support workers by providing the necessary training to become





proficient in what they do. The implications for church leaders are obvious. Are the new individuals entering the field of ministry being formed and trained with the pastoral knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes needed to be effective ministers of the gospel? Is ongoing formation and education a priority in our dioceses and religious congregations? In addition to making it a priority, there is a need to adequately fund such efforts.

Building on Nalewicki's suggestions in the previous paragraph, she expands on the implications of these. She declares that in the workplace and in the world today there is a need to develop a spirit of collaboration, emphasizing the gifts that each brings to the task; and, to customize the ongoing formation and training to meet the specific needs of each individual. The summary she provides rings true for the needs in the broad field of ministry today.

The hope is that, through the spirit of collaboration, coupled with the passing down of institutional memory and perpetuation of corporate identity, we could enhance work atmosphere and employee commitment.

And, we could add, the hope is that we can more effectively accomplish the mission of Jesus Christ. Nalewicki emphasizes three things to foster success: a spirit of collaboration, institutional memory and the perpetuation of a corporate identity. We will comment further on the element of collaboration

in the third example. David Nygren and Miriam Ukeritis' comprehensive study of Religious Life in the United States began from the principle that when there is a lack of role identity within the institution in which one is employed, there will be minimum commitment. It appears that some ministers may lack a sense of corporate identity with the church and, at times, may see the church more as an adversary than an ally.

Another of the concerns that emerged from our interviews with the archbishops and a subsequent meeting with them was that many of the younger people in ministry today seem unaware of what transpired during the Second Vatican Council. They lack the institutional memory of this event. The archbishops saw this as a major concern in continuing to foster our sense of mission.

The archbishops also spoke of the influence the laity in the world had had on them and how they tapped into the resources of these people to help them reach wise decisions in their ministry. One archbishop spoke of his personal negligence in the sexual abuse scandal. He declared that, if he had only sought the wisdom and insight of married couples, he would definitely have made better decisions.

Nalewicki claims that for the first time in U.S. history we have three very different generations working side by side with different attitudes, work ethics and skills sets: Baby Boomers who value

hard work and dedication, Gen Xers, who value a strong balance between life and work, and Generation Y, highly knowledgeable about all the advancements in the technical field. She hypothesizes that this sometimes results in tension, low morale and reduced productivity. In many dioceses there is an impression that much of the tension among clergy is related to the fact that young priests and older priests come from vastly different mind sets and theologies. They not only come from different age cohorts, but the focus of their formation had vastly different goals. We have heard some older priests describe themselves as Vatican II priests and pejoratively describe their younger colleagues as Pope John Paul II priests. In one diocese priests distinguish between those priests who are pastoral and those who are sacramental. What is being done in dioceses to bridge this gap that seriously impedes the mission of Jesus Christ? Too often church leaders give voice to divisive attitudes and labeling similar to the those described in First Corinthians. Some claimed to belong to Paul and some to Apollos, as opposed to being "of one heart and one mind" (Acts 4:32). Do the individuals involved realize that such labeling creates tension and division and impedes the opportunity to bring the gifts of each person into common, collaborative ministry? We believe that labeling is often the result of low self-esteem.



### Example Three

Much of our current ministry is focused on fostering the development of collaborative ministry. Collaborative ministry is a way of fostering the mission of Jesus. Collaboration is based on the belief that every single baptized person has been both gifted and called to ministry and/or service. Collaboration is not an end in itself, but rather a means for accomplishing the mission of Jesus Christ. Our knowledge and understanding of collaboration has been enhanced by many sources: church documents, our experience in many different cultures and the business world.

One of the first questions we ask people during workshops is, "Why should you collaborate?" It is our conviction that unless there are deep, passionate reasons for collaborating it will never happen. Some of the most dominant reasons we have heard come from individuals in the workplace. While teaching a course at the University of San Francisco, one student gave us a most practical, common-sense, compelling reason for collaborating. As an architect, he stated, "If I don't collaborate with the electricians, plumbers and other craftsmen, I wouldn't have the money to feed my family."

The most compelling reason for collaborating was given to us by the doctor in charge of a neonatal clinic in Alaska. He had heard that we were working with the archdiocese and contacted us to see if we would be willing to conduct a workshop for the entire staff of the clinic. We inquired what topic he wanted us to address. His answer was, "Collaboration." When asked why this topic, his answer was immediate and spoken with deep conviction: "If we don't collaborate, babies die." His answer filled us with awe and humility. We wondered how many people in church ministry understand that if we don't collaborate, people die spiritually.

Pope John Paul II offered a powerful, pastoral reason for collaborating. He declared, "In order to meet the contemporary demands of evangelization, collaboration with the laity is becoming more and more indispensable." He did not suggest that it would be a nice idea to possibly consider. He was adamant in declaring it indispensable. He also

added that the reason for collaboration was not because there was a reduction in the number of priests and religious. Rather, he said, "this is a new, unprecedented opportunity that God is offering us."

Recently, more and more church leaders have encouraged greater collaboration in every aspect of church ministry. Cardinal Roger Mahony, in the pastoral *As I Have Done for You*, compared the parish of 1955 with the parish of today and his final conclusion is that the church today must be more collaborative and more inclusive.

There are many church documents that are filled with great insights, wisdom and challenges regarding collaborative ministry. Our favorite document is one published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *From Words to Deeds* (1998). Among the many insights contained in this short, compact document are five concrete, practical steps for collaboration.

While expecting to find wisdom and challenge regarding collaboration in church documents, we have been amazed and edified by the avid commitment to collaboration found in some of the business literature. We would like to cite just one book, by Robert Hargrove, as an example of the wisdom regarding collaboration that can be gleaned from the business world. It is amazing to read in a business book concepts that are associated with church documents.

We are in the middle of a shift today . . . a shift to an era of creativity and collaboration, a shift to an era of reconciliation, an era of compassion that will help to solve the world's worst problems. . . . The breakthrough of the twenty-first century will come from an expanding concept of what it is to be a human—something we call being a collaborative person.

To see the words reconciliation and compassion in a book for business leaders may challenge our stereotype of the business leader. But it is exactly in challenging that stereotype that we allow ourselves to be influenced by the wisdom which exists among business leaders.

Hargrove offers a number of other insights that should challenge church leaders. He claims that solutions to the problems we encounter in our world

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today will not be found by experts working in isolation, but by a process of dialog and collaboration. Collaboration, he says, can only occur in situations in which there is open, honest dialog. He quotes management guru and specialist, Peter Drucker, who claims that the single most important shift in the way business and work are being done today is from "ownership" to "partnership," and from "individual tasks" to "collaboration." Truly, as church, we have much to learn from the leaders in the business world.

### Example Four

Several years ago we had the opportunity to interview Christians of many different denominations in the marketplace. We chose Christians who lived their lives in such a way that others who worked with them declared them to be clear witnesses to the Christian faith.

The genesis for the interview project occurred when we were on a panel with other authors and workshop presenters. We panelists were asked what we thought was necessary to bring about important changes in the church during the next ten years. Midway through the panel responses it became evident to us that we panelists did not have the answer to that question. We gave the same suggestions that we had been making for many years, none of which seemed to produce significant change. After this experience, we decided to interview individuals in the business world who influenced those with whom they worked by the way in which they lived their lives. We dubbed them the "Wisdom People."

In the interviews we we desired:

- To identify the values that influenced the ways they lived their lives,
- To determine the genesis of those values,
- To name their sources of support,
- To discern the cause of stress for them in the workplace,
- To decide if they viewed what they did in the workplace as part of the Christian vocation,
- And finally, to make recommendations to those in leadership in the church.

The experience was one of the greatest learning opportunities of our lives. Their sharing was simple, honest and humble. As a result we learned much from them.

One of the ~~most~~ profound things we learned came from the responses we received to the question, "What are the values that influenced the way you live your life?" The first ten people we interviewed, in six different states, responded with almost the exact same words, "You have to do the right thing, regardless of the consequences." The value they proposed was integrity. Many of their stories spoke of suffering and the loss of financial gain that accompanied those acts of integrity. When asked what they would recommend to church leaders, they encouraged and challenged them to be people of integrity. Pope Paul VI many years earlier counseled religious leaders to the same behavior, "People don't listen to teachers (or preachers), they listen to witnesses and when they do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." Christian witnesses are people of integrity whose lives reflect what they say and proclaim.

### CONCLUSION

We live in a divided world. Countries and politicians function unilaterally and refuse to pool their common wisdom and resources. Their basic stance is adversarial rather than collaborative. As a result people suffer. We as church are being offered an opportunity to witness to a different mindset, one in which the church and the world see the value, wisdom and gift in the other. The questions we face are: What will we do to offer our witness of collaboration? Who will take the initiative required for growth and healing? In what ways will the church, in humility, acknowledge that it has much to learn from people in the world? The Second Vatican Council challenged us to see the goodness and the giftedness in the world. What will be our personal and ecclesial response? Will we choose what is truly life-giving? As Moses counseled in the book of Deuteronomy, "Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19).

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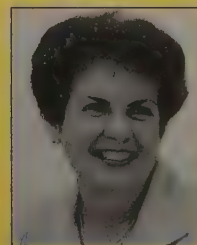
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For further information on the research conducted with the retired archbishops, see *Church*, Vol. 24, #2-4 or go to <http://www.nd.edu/~icl/council-elders/elders-intro.shtml>.



Sister Carroll Juliano, S.H.C.J., and Brother Loughlan Sofield, S.T., have co-authored numerous books. Their most recent, *Principled Ministry: A Guidebook for Catholic Church Leaders*, is published by Ave Maria Press.





# *Pastoral Councils*

Why They Frequently Fail, and How to Keep It From Happening Again

George B. Wilson, S.J.





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Younger members of the Catholic Church may not know, and older ones may have forgotten, that there was a time (within the lifetime of many Catholics still shuffling about) when there were no parish pastoral councils, much less diocesan ones. The councils we are familiar with today came into existence under the inspiration of the Second Vatican Council, later confirmed in the Code of Canon Law.

Different readers will doubtless have a variety of opinions about the wisdom of introducing such councils in the first place. That question aside, I begin from the simple fact that they are, and in all likelihood will continue to be, with us. They are "facts on the ground," as the contemporary idiom has it.

The theological ground for introducing these vehicles for inviting the laity to share responsibility for the life of their church was a renewed and deepened appreciation of the implications of the sacrament of Baptism. Incorporation into the church at Baptism is not merely some sort of administrative action which places the name of the new member on some church register. When a catechumen enters into the mystery of Christ unfolding through the life of the Christian community a profound new relationship is created. Both the catechumen and the receiving community are changed. Each assumes a new responsibility for the faith-life of the other. Each is called to attend to the voice of the Spirit speaking through the experience of the other. In both cases it involves listening with respect to messages we—the individual or the community—may not want to hear.



Operationally, the creation of councils was meant to generate a sense of mutual responsibility for the life and mission of the community of faith. Prior to such councils all the energy and power flowed in one direction, *from* the clergy *to* the laity. With the introduction of councils the power would flow in two directions. The laity would enjoy a new form of empowerment (along with a new sense of adult responsibility). The pastors would presumably get new energy from a broader base of wisdom—at the psychic cost of abandoning all illusions of omniscience and having to *attend* to a broader picture than the shepherd's limited perspectives and insights offered.

#### WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

After these many years of living with these councils it is very appropriate that the church look to competent researchers to gather and analyze data about the effectiveness of these structures for sharing responsibility. I do not enjoy that kind of competence. What follows is, rather, a conclusion based on more than thirty years of experience as a church consultant engaged, up close and personally, with many pastors and councils working on live agendas, at both the parochial and episcopal levels.

In their attempt to create organizational structures that would satisfy the deep impulse for broader sharing of responsibility, the bishops at Vatican II, as well as the post-conciliar implementation bodies, clearly did not want the new structures, in one single stroke, to bring the laity from a state of zero empowerment to full-blown *decision-making* responsibility. From the perspective of organizational theory that was arguably a wise choice. As desirable as an ideal end-state of shared decision-making might be, drastic and sudden change in a social system as large as the Catholic Church can bring with it consequences more destructive than the flaws in the original system.

So a decision-making role was off the table. But if the deeper impulse toward sharing responsibility is not to remain a phantom of the imagination, new structures must have at least

*some* operational consequences. If new structures bring no actual change in the power relationship, they are destined only to create a new source of disappointment and anger. To raise hopes, even unwittingly, only to dash them is a formula for alienation.

What to do? The magic key to the dilemma was found in the word *advisory*. Councils would give the laity a new experience of their baptismal dignity by formally empowering their representatives to offer *advice*. They were to give *counsel* to those responsible as pastors for the direction of the church in their particular area of the vineyard, whether that be the parish or a diocese.

#### THEORY—AND PRACTICE

In theory the choice represented a real step forward. After all, who could argue against the idea that broadening the perspective of a leader's limited grasp of a situation, as well as the range of options available to him, is a bad thing? Getting a more comprehensive picture of the situation surely has value—even if the leader is not legally obliged to follow the counsel offered by his community's representatives.

In practice, however, there was a hitch in the solution. "Advisory" or "consultative" are adjectives. Whether or not they achieve their intended effects depends on the way the parties to the new relationship behave. The words challenge the pastor, on the one hand, to listen with an open mind. That calls the leader to loosen his initial commitment either to his assessment of the situation or to his preferred response to it. It requires the lay advisers to develop the skills required to present their ideas in a constructive manner, not as demands which only lead the pastor to hunker down in defense of his (limited) position.

*Thus the call for training—but is that the deepest issue?*

The analysis to this point would suggest that, if the structures are to be effective, a major focus should be on *training*: for the offering of advice to work, both parties need to learn things like listening skills or the arts of adult

dialogue. The shepherds needed to learn how to listen; the faithful needed to learn how to propose their ideas. And indeed, the church has put considerable resources to exactly that purpose. Over the years I have seen numerous such training programs, of varying levels of sophistication and effectiveness.

That same experience has led me, however, to conclude that, if councils are to reach their full potential, the real issue does not lie at the level of skills development. It lies at a deeper level of the human psyche. By settling for an adjective to name the new form of empowerment, the law-makers gave those pastors who were reluctant to share responsibility free rein to treat the whole innovation as expressing a nice, pious ideal. Hortatory adjectives bring with them no operational consequences.

In many, many cases the term "advisory" came, in effect, to mean "merely advisory." The positive challenge implied in the word was bypassed; all the emphasis was placed on its boundary-setting function. It came to mean simply "not deciding." The letter of the law might have been fulfilled, but the process envisioned in it was aborted. The actual advising effectively came to an end once the counsel was offered. The council shared its perspective; end of story; nothing more to say. The consultation implied in the law became one-directional, ending at the ear of the advisee. Any eventual decision then appears bearing no trace of any prior interaction. On hearing the leader's choice of action one would be totally unaware that there had been any action at all by the members of the council.

Sometimes the re-formulation was quite overt. More than one pastor in my hearing told his council in so many words that they were "merely advisory." But in some cases the resistance was even more disturbing. It wasn't hard to hear even deeper subtexts at work. Some more blatant examples would be: "I don't have to listen to these people." "They are theologically ignorant." "I know what we need to do; it's a waste of time to sit there and listen to people who don't know what they're talking about."



At the extreme I have witnessed, all too often, an outgoing leader's solid development of a faith community over many years was torn down within months by the incoming pastor (priest or bishop) without the slightest sign of any listening to the wisdom acquired by the community over the previous years of development. That the Spirit might have been at work in the decisions of the preceding leadership was apparently never even considered. *L'église c'est moi.*

#### *Why turn to—the law?*

It appears, then, that it will take more than training to bring about more effective councils. Deeper obstacles are at work. We must reckon with a fact borne out by history. It is not easy for anyone in power to give it away—or for those previously without it to claim it. Especially if the empowerment is embedded in a clericalized culture that has held sway for centuries. That is not a matter of ill will on anyone's part. It is simply true that long-standing practice brings with it a form of relational inertia; that force is more powerful than any personal motivation on the part of any individual, whether for good or ill. In the face of that deep blockage what can be hoped for from the law?

In its present form canon law proposes an ideal. It offers no stimulus for the shepherd to live up to that ideal, to do the hard work involved in letting go of control and taking conciliar structures seriously. In the face of clericalized inertia how might some minor codicils to our present law move us beyond the level of pious ideals? By creating an incentive to help the pastor and council to enter seriously into the process of sharing responsibility.

I would propose two addenda to current law, or to a particular council's bylaws.

The first: When a significant percentage (say, two-thirds) of the council is in agreement that the pastor's proposed course of action is not in the best interest of the faith community, the pastor would be required to give a *public presentation to the faith community, not*

*only of his proposed decision, but of his rationale for it.* The presentation could be written or oral but it would be required.

Such a presentation might not satisfy the community, of course. Even the best law does not guarantee that leaders will be wise. But the very existence of such a requirement could have the salutary effect of making the leaders at least *pause*. The knowledge that the shepherd must work at presenting a plausible case for his decision—in public—provides a powerful incentive for him to challenge himself lest his presentation reveal the weakness of his decision-making process. The prospect of egg on one's face can be a powerful motivator. A caring council would work to forestall such an outcome.

The second addendum addresses a situation in which the disconnect between pastor and council is even greater. If the council membership is *unanimous* in its rejection of the pastor's proposed action the movement toward decision would be halted; some form of intervention, mediation or facilitation would be mandated.

#### POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

The measures proposed would appear to be reasonable enough: when the likelihood exists that a proposed step will only undermine the leader's capacity to lead the community, it seems only prudent to put some break on the momentum toward decision.

What kind of outcomes might be anticipated by the adoption of these two measures? Three possible scenarios suggest themselves.

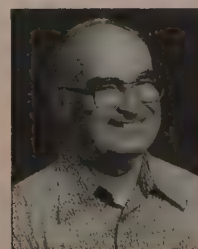
In the case of those many parochial and diocesan leaders and councils who have already generated a climate of genuine trust and mutuality the adoption would be a non-event. They are already living the kind of relationship in which the conditions implied in the addenda would simply not occur.

At the opposite extreme, where the leader's natural difficulty at learning to share responsibility has been shown to be overt hostility to the very idea, the situation is probably too far gone for the proposed codicils—or any, for

that matter—to have any effect. In that case direct intervention of higher authority would seem to be the only remedy.

It's the leaders and councils who fall in the middle that might be helped by these provisions. They are pastors and parishioners who know intuitively what is being asked of them. They want to grow together but they have learned from experience that arriving at common ground can take hard work. It requires patience and commitment—and time! When the struggle becomes particularly difficult, the temptation is to give up and walk away. Knowing that to take that course would bring into play a consequence that all would want to avoid might just be the incentive to stay at the table and explore new options that might lead to undiscovered common ground. The satisfaction that comes from being able to put before the community a decision supported by both the council and the pastor is worth the extra effort.

And a given pastor and council need not wait for a higher legal structure to initiate the two provisions. They could study them, see their wisdom, and revise their bylaws accordingly, perhaps at the meeting when new members are taking their positions on the council.



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# Eros and the Cal

Ben Harrison, M.C.

When people ask me what drew me to the Catholic Church, I usually answer that it was the rich tradition of contemplative spirituality. Most of the other things that attracted me (the Church's appreciation of nature, realistic understanding of humankind, Eucharistic devotion, liturgical worship, art and culture, profound and coherent theology, charitable works, intelligent social teaching, asceticism, mystical doctrine, appreciation of silence and solitude) probably either flowed from or were cultivated within that contemplative milieu which was from early times associated with monastic life.





# to Religious Life





I use the term monasticism in the broadest sense, to include various trends that preceded the first flowering of Christian consecrated life in the Egyptian desert in the Third Century, and also the numerous variations that emerged over the centuries: not just the early hermits and virgins, the monks and nuns, but later also the canons and friars, the religious priests, brothers and sisters engaged in apostolic works and missionary outreach. All of this tradition of vibrant, lived spirituality was the gravitational ballast that pulled me irresistibly to the Catholic Church, and I cannot conceive of the Catholic Church surviving without that bedrock of radically committed faith represented by the monastic tradition in this broad sense.

I suppose that is what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* means when it quotes *Lumen Gentium*: "The state of life which is constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels, while not entering into the hierarchical structure of the Church, belongs undeniably to her life and holiness" (CCC 914). It does not say exactly that religious life is an essential aspect of the Church, but in my opinion it is, for in order for the Church to be truly Catholic, it must have room for the full range of human temperaments and be open to the deepest reaches of human consciousness. The Church

must continue to incarnate that intimacy that Christ has with the Father and the secret bond that he has with each beloved disciple.

#### IS CELIBACY STILL MEANINGFUL?

You can imagine, then, how disturbing it is for me to hear people saying that religious life, particularly the more active variety, is destined to diminish in our developed Western society, largely because celibacy, the vow of chastity, no longer seems necessary or meaningful. We hear it said that, thanks to the healthier attitudes toward sexuality and a more collaborative atmosphere in ministry, it is now possible for young people to find a career in service of the church and the poor without the need of sacrificing marriage and family, and certainly without making a lifetime commitment to celibacy.

Some commentators call into question the value of celibacy as urged by St. Paul (1 Corinthians 7), saying that our actual situation today bears no similarity to the situation in Paul's day, when it seemed that the world was coming to an end and that the *Parousia* was imminent. It is true that religious life has always prospered in periods when established cultures were crumbling and societies were in flux. If the actual,

temporal end of the world seems close, there is a certain logic in refraining from marrying or bringing children into the world. But even in times like the present, which certainly seems to be a time of great change—of radical shifts in culture, ethnic conflict, economic turmoil and environmental disaster—some people feel called to dig down to bedrock and seek to anchor society's deeper values for the sake of an emergent future. Some are called to dig the foundations, or even to lay down their lives as the foundations, so that faith will be the rock on which the next resurgence of culture is built.

Further, some people seem, even by temperament, to be called to live on the edges of society, in a radical awareness of the ephemeral quality of all human enterprises and in harmony with the seasons, cycles and tangents of nature's constant changes. The sea ends not only where it rushes upon the rocks and the sand, but also along its entire surface, where water touches sky and evaporates into air. In a similar way, one who lives constantly aware of his own and society's evanescence is as close to the end of the world as someone who lives in the last days. So Paul's exhortation to celibacy can be read in view of the fact that both on an individual and a social level, we and our world are in fact passing away from one moment to the next.





Despite these objections, the implied claim above that there will be fewer religious vocations may well be true. There are surely plenty of ways a man or woman can be of service to God's kingdom without entering religious life and taking a vow of chastity. It is also true that most Catholic Christians these days do not feel an urgent foreboding of society's collapse or the world's end. So it is perhaps the case that, due to these factors, active religious life in the developed world may not recover from the dearth of vocations of past years. However, there are other factors to consider.

One is that everything changes often and in unexpected ways. Will the present mindset, influenced by psychology and the sexual revolutions of the recent few decades, remain in force? Will Western society continue the liberalizing, democratizing, egalitarian tendencies of the past century? And if not, will there be a reversion toward older models or will "progress" head off in totally new and unpredictable directions? It is possible that cultural norms which seem self-evident at present may shift, and that values which seem convincing now may someday seem quaint or misguided. Perhaps we are not the vanguard of human evolution that we imagine ourselves to be, but just one of many variations that will someday lead to a new synthesis. Perhaps the fact that our present culture is not amenable to particular manifestations of consecrated life that arose as apostolic orders between the Councils of Trent and Vatican II is due as much to the peculiarities of our present culture as to the nature of those manifestations.

As I myself have struggled to integrate my personal temperament, which is rather monastic, with the demands of membership in an order actively serving the poor, I have come to believe that the default position of religious life is monastic. I think that is true for the orders which evolved from within the monastic ambient and moved out into teaching, preaching, medical works and missionary activities. It is probably true even for later orders that emerged directly from earlier active orders. The enterprise of founding a new institute

does not usually succeed unless the founder's inspiration has gestated through long periods of silent prayer, often in some sort of monastic retreat or solitary place. Furthermore, most active orders train their new members in a fairly structured environment reminiscent of a disciplined, monastic regime. Priests who celebrate Mass for communities of retired missionary sisters assure me that many of these women, very active in their prime, live a deeply contemplative lifestyle, comparable to that of cloistered nuns. I see all this as evidence that apostolic religious life is a variation on the monastic theme, from which it emerges and toward which it returns.

My paradigm for this ambivalence between the active and contemplative life-styles is captured by a story from the Desert Fathers. I would say that during that early period of ascetical experimentation and spiritual exploration, the embryonic stem-cells from which all the various later developments in religious life developed were already present.

The story is of a monk named Agatho. As was the custom, he lived in strict silence and solitude, earning his keep by weaving baskets or some such craft. Occasionally he would take his wares to the city and sell them at a fair price, but on this particular occasion he "found a stranger lying in an alley sick, and with none to care for him: and the old man stayed there and hired a cell for himself, and tended the sick man and supported him with the work of his own hands. For four months he stayed there, till he had healed the sick man: and so returned again to his own cell" (Waddell, 1966).

I see this story as a description of how some of those who are attracted to a contemplative way of life are by temperament drawn away from strict monastic observance by the needs of the poor or other exigencies of love. Christ at prayer in the night, in the garden, or on the mountain, alone or with his chosen few, is the homing place. But various needs call the religious to go out from the cloister for a time to engage in active ministry. This could take the form of monks who teach in

the abbey school, nuns engaged in medical work in mission territories, or active religious busy with preaching, catechesis and social ministries. I can see this dynamic in action in at least two ways: a person with a contemplative bent who is nevertheless temperamentally inclined toward active ministry; or a person who is temperamentally inclined toward the contemplative life, but who feels impelled by God to first look after the needs of his neighbor. However active the person may be, it remains the case that "the first and foremost duty of all religious is to be the contemplation of divine things and assiduous union with God in prayer" (*Code of Canon Law* 663.1).

Many of the anecdotes from these earliest Christian monks make it clear that, from its inception, monastic life has had as its goal the fulfillment of Christ's law of love and the attempt to live according to his teachings and precepts. For many centuries the Gospels were read from within the monastic mindset, as a manual or guide for spiritual practice. (Popular examples would be *The Imitation of Christ* in the Western Church, and *The Philokalia* in the East.) The radical focus on loving God with all one's being was always finely balanced with the need to love one's neighbor, whether monk, visitor, or poor person, as oneself, or better, as Christ. A very large number of anecdotes from the Desert Fathers indicate the wisdom of giving priority to love and forgiveness rather than to rules and mortifications.

#### LOVING GOD WITH OUR WHOLE BEING

The biblical injunction to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength is a way of saying that we are called to love God with our whole being and with all our energies. Taking C.S. Lewis's *The Four Loves* as our guide, we see that the New Testament uses four Greek words that can be translated as "love." We are to love God not only with all of our faculties and all aspects of our humanity, but also in all the various ways we are able to love. Thus we must love him with a devotional, familial





affection as parent and brother, but also as our most faithful friend and most cherished companion. We must love him with the pure and holy charity of *agape*, but we must also pour out our passionate love for him in the eros of the mystics.

Though all Christians, indeed all people, are called to love God in this total manner, the vowed life has always been the preeminent milieu in which people have expressed their love for God in eros, that passionate being-in-love with the Divine that has characterized the mystical life in every generation of contemplatives, saints, and doctors of the Church. Why is this so? Perhaps it is because that passionate love for God, enkindled by the Holy Spirit, in many souls requires an unambiguous commitment of an exclusive nature. If you read the mystical literature through the centuries, you see that as one is drawn into the magnetic field of fascination with the Holy, one becomes entirely focused on the divine beauty and wants to give oneself completely to the One who incites that love in us. As we progress in the spiritual life, each of the four loves increases in its own measure and in its own manner, but it is eros that is most

distinctively attuned to the mystical union which is the fruition of the contemplative way of knowing and loving God. That is why the great teachers through the ages have so often used spousal imagery and spoken of spiritual betrothal and marriage as the consummation of the spiritual journey.

It is also true that eros, being exuberant, is harder to direct and contain. As M. Scott Peck and others point out, since the spiritual and the sexual seem to be the two strongest strands of our human psyche, it is not surprising that they sometimes become entangled. Perhaps for most, it is a lifetime's work to learn how to channel the energy of eros entirely into one's relationship with and service of God.

Though there were always the "pure contemplatives" who were drawn in this search for the Beloved to the solitude and silence of the eremitical or cloistered life, in the past few centuries many have expressed that ardor for God through service of the poor and missionary activity. Most if not all of the founders of active orders, both of men and women, had such an intense, heart-felt love of God. In recent years, Mother Teresa consistently

spoke of Jesus as her spouse and saw her service as her way of touching him, quenching his thirst in the poor, tenderly and reverently doing for the suffering what she would like to do for him. Her passionate spousal love of Christ, even in times of darkness, was the energizing force behind her works of service.

#### THE NEED FOR WITNESSES

If the active forms of religious life are fading out, in my opinion, it is not because young people are not willing to make the sacrifice of celibacy on behalf of a career of service. It is because when young people look at active religious, they too often see *people engaged in a career* and not *people passionately in love* with One who wants to possess them, body, soul, heart and mind, and who is able to enkindle a reciprocating fire within them. One of the most distinctive features of society at present is the dominant place of eros. We have discovered the power of sexuality and made a god of eros. Although excitement can be cheap and satisfaction can be easy, this doesn't mean that we can't still find them, must not





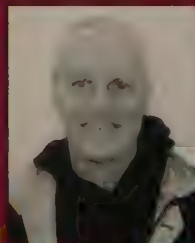
still seek them, in a higher form, in our relationship with God. Social mores and cultural norms will never stop changing and evolving, but God will remain the polestar of eros. Maybe young people need to see evidence that the vow of chastity, a life of celibacy, is not a life devoid of eros. On the contrary, chastity, when lived with integrity and conviction, is a way of loving God fervently and with our full humanity, a way of intimacy that leads beyond mere human ecstasy to a consummation, sometimes even in this life, that we cannot imagine or describe.

When I lived in Britain I would sometimes sit amidst ruins of ancient abbeys while tourists chatted and sheep grazed, and I would think, "How is it possible that humanity has lost the yearning for the Transcendent that drove the construction of all this? Am I some sort of oddity or anachronism that this still speaks so forcefully to me?" Perhaps some particular forms of vowed life are in the process of dying out, but I believe that once our civilization moves past its present fixation with all things sexual, we will discover that a vast pool of contemplative longing lies beneath the surface.

A dictionary definition of eros is "the aggregate of pleasure-directed life instincts whose energy is derived from libido," or, "love directed toward self-realization" (*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1981). Humankind will realize the full depths of its purpose and discover its deepest joys only in union with the God who is the source of all life. I cannot conceive of a world in which that passionate desire to belong body and soul to God will not find ways to incarnate itself in the Church, socially as well as individually. The breadth and depth of our need to give ourselves is far greater than we know. And there is One who knows that need because it corresponds to his desire to give himself to us without limit and without end. Men and women consecrated by the vows are called to be witnesses, here and now, of the absolute and all-encompassing bond of mutual self-gift that can exist between God and the human person. Their lives can be a sign and pledge of the transcendent heights and the primordial depths of the love and joy which God desires for his beloved.

#### RECOMMENDED READING

Waddell, H. *The Desert Fathers* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966), 146.



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# WHO IS MY

James Torrens, S.J.

When asked to identify the greatest commandment, Jesus, after doing so, added a second one in these words from Leviticus, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." His interrogator shot back, "And who is my neighbor?" As an observant Jew, the questioner meant, "Whom can I rank on a level with myself? The outsiders are many." Jesus, in turn, reversed the equation with the parable of the Good Samaritan, telling the man, in effect, "No one should be foreign to your goodness and compassion."

The question, "Who is my neighbor?" deserves asking in a positive spirit. The person living next door to me, who is he or she, really? The one with whom I just did business or who sits next to me at the ballpark yelling for the other team, who are you, not just on the surface but deeper inside? God loves you into being right now, and guides you somehow, so I should be interested.

My upbringing was pretty sheltered and parochial. My entry into religious life did not alter this appreciably for quite a while. Just after ordination, when I came back from theology studies in Europe, which were broadening in their own way, someone arranged for me to meet Reinhold Niebuhr, the leading U.S. Protestant theologian, in his New York apartment. I knew almost nothing about him and his depth of reflection upon the social gospel, and I revealed this pretty quickly. He was kind, but must have shaken his head afterwards. A little later, at the University of Michigan, while in the student union with some undergrads preparing for an exam, I heard one of them say, "I am upset with my mother, because she didn't phone me for Hanukkah." And I asked, "What's Hanukkah?" The others just gaped at me. A large swath of neighbors were still out of my ken.

Whatever I did know of humanity outside my circle came, I suppose, mostly from novels. Toward the end of my first year of theology, I got drawn into an international best seller, Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*. It almost cost me a passing grade in oral exams, but it did open up a whole other world. No

wonder Sigmund Freud thought of creative writers as natural psychologists long before there was any such profession. To be sure, the kind of fiction written by formula, the pot boilers, do not penetrate the psyche very far, but the masters, such as Alice Munro, William Trevor, Tobias Wolff, Joyce Carol Oates, sparkle by what they lay bare about motivation and character and personality. "Fiction," says Annie Murphy Paul, "with its redolent details, imaginative metaphors and attentive descriptions of people and their actions," allows us "to enter fully into other people's thoughts and feelings" (*New York Times*, Sunday Review, March 18, 2012).

At this stage of my priestly life, when the next confession I hear may turn up yet another distinct version of human weakness and family dysfunction and personal courage, I realize how much there always is to discover about the human species. Its inexhaustible variety is most apparent to me at the Department of Motor Vehicles. Everyone who is ever behind a wheel (well, almost everyone!) has to line up there, and what a panoply. What an array of bodily shapes and heads of hair and outer wear, to say nothing of tattoos and piercings. *Homo sapiens*, every brand. Each is a story. Each, despite appearances or behavior, is a child of God. And as Saint Paul pointed out, "Star differs from star in brightness" (1 Corinthians 15:41).

Back in our communities, gated or not, we can fence ourselves off, consciously or not. One can live within a welter of humanity like the city of Los Angeles and never ride a bus and thus never meet the people who make the city run—the clean-up people, the waitresses, the nannies and odd jobbers—to say nothing of teens and elderly poor. Yet Christ is very much there to be met in male or female, speaking Tagalog or Haitian Creole.

I still have to buck myself up for the Greyhound stations. The neighbor in the waiting room may be enjoying a respite from the streets, loud or stretched out asleep or in all too obvious disrepair. This is when the priest tends to travel





# NEIGHBOR?

without the collar, yet that is no excuse for failing to be neighbor. If any public servant in our society deserves merit badges, who more than the Greyhound driver? He or she has to be a heavy-lifter, a crowd controller and a navigator punctual to the minute. I once knew a retired driver, Julio Fernandez, who had logged a million miles. What a serene and humorous man—a bit of a theologian too. Talk about psychologist!

Talk about *la comédie humaine*! I am no extrovert, by a long shot. And none of us, really, can manage more than a thin slice of the human pie. But we can do it with relish. We can appreciate new kinds of acquaintance and have the patience to sit with just about anybody. The public mix includes all kinds of egoists, conmen and -women, the lost and the unbalanced. As Saint John tells us, "Jesus did not need anyone to testify about human nature. He himself understood it well" (John 2:24-25). All too well! But the mix also includes some marvels of humanity, battle-scarred often, with a wisdom hard-won, shaming us with their ready goodness despite the few earthly goods to their name.

In Manhattan in the 1990s I volunteered at prison chaplaincy with one of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, known for this special ministry. I can remember Sister Carmela Capobianco telling me one time how, when a street person had just approached her for a handout, she took him into a nearby coffee shop for donuts. No need for her to ask, "Who is my neighbor?" Bless her, she had gotten the message.



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## ECONOMY CLASS

Those who go by Greyhound  
bunch up at doorways One to Five  
with a bulge of suitcases  
a child or two in arms  
in tank tops, cut offs, tennies  
jam their packs onto the upper shelf  
settle in, spreading their rumps  
and will quip with the driver  
enfold you willy-nilly in their stories  
their amplified *tete a tete*  
or drop off to the sleep of the just.  
This unbuttoned world  
takes some getting into the swim of.




# *Finding God and Ourselves in Parables*

John Navone, S.J.







Jesus' invitation to enter his kingdom comes in the form of parables, a characteristic feature of his teaching (Mark 4:33-34). Through his parables he invites people to the feast of the kingdom, but he also asks for a radical choice: to gain the kingdom, one must give everything (Matthew 13:44-45; 22:1-14). Words are not enough; deeds are required (Matthew 21:28-32). The parables are like mirrors for us: will we be hard soil or good earth for the word (Matthew 13:3-9)? What use have we made of the talents we have received (Matthew 25:14-30)? Jesus and the presence of the kingdom in this world are secretly at the heart of the parables. One must enter the kingdom, that is, become a disciple of Christ, in order to "know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 13:11). For those who stay "outside," everything remains enigmatic (Mark 4:11).

The Christian community of faith believes that God speaks to us, communicating himself to us in his Word Incarnate, Jesus, the living parable of the living God. Jesus communicates the parable that he is in the parables he tells, enabling us to hear the befriending God who speaks in time and space, as the Origin, Ground and Destiny of all humankind. Jesus Christ is the parable that God tells of our ultimate Source and Resource for the fullness of life. His life story is the divine pedagogy for communion with Happiness Itself: the Light of the Word reveals himself as the Way, the Truth and the Life of Happiness Itself. He is the Good News that we have been created by Happiness Itself for Happiness Itself. He is the Good News of the empowering and unfailing grace and call of Happiness Itself.

## A NEW WAY OF SEEING

Our faith-conviction that God is the primordial Source and Resource for all creation and human life inspires our gratitude for all as gift and our boundless hope that the best is yet to come. The abundance of God is the ultimate Source and Resource of Christian hope in the face of death, grounding our conviction that there is more where that came from. There is an artesian well in everyone whose Source is the abundance of God. We are what we are because of who our Parent is, and once this identity—through the gift of the Holy Spirit—becomes deeply rooted in our being, then an unselfconscious giving of self will become a way of life. This is another way of saying that we "inherit the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

By the grace of God, we are what we are. Our worth is a gift given to us from the moment of our creation. The marvel of our life in Christ is not getting something from the outside to the inside by achieving. Instead, the marvel is coming to recognize what is *already* inside by the grace of creation, and learning to bring this outside by sharing and serving. It consists in seeing the first thing that ever happened to us—our birth—the way God sees it, and regarding it alongside God as something "very, very good."

Jesus gives us this new way of perceiving the event of our beginnings—and thus of our whole lives. We, too, can begin to look on our creation the way Genesis depicts God as looking on all creation. When this begins to occur, delight rather than dissatisfaction becomes the lens through which all is perceived. What



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world. It was a  
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and unmerited gift.*

begins with a new appreciation of our own birth extends to the world itself, which means that the spirit of chronic dissatisfaction is replaced by the spirit of the One who first looked on creation and pronounced it “good.”

Every one of us has been given our chance to live by the action of Another. We did not engineer our birth into the world. It was a gift—a sheer, total and unmerited gift. We were all given the same mandate as well: to do with our gifts and power what God does with his. God is not an irresponsible and indifferent giver. Jesus tells us that God is going to want to know at the end of our journey what we have done with all we were given in the beginning through the abundance of divine generosity. Creation is at bottom an act of generosity—God sharing his bounty. We have been made in the image of Generosity for Generosity. Our Creator’s magnanimity lies at the root of our being the kind of creatures that we were meant to be. Just as there is delight in our recognizing how much we have that we do not deserve or create, so there is a godly delight in seeing our generosity bless and energize others.

The parables of Jesus teach that we have to decide about what God has already decided—namely, that we are invited to share God’s joy. The joy that God sets before us can only be received, it cannot be forced on us. In the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Pharisee and the Publican Jesus invites us to share that joy.

All of the parables of Jesus assume that we are made in the image and likeness of a dynamic and creative God, and that we do know something of God’s ecstasy when we are in communion with God and what he is doing. It is then that we become what God had in mind for us from the beginning. It is then that we follow the example of the Holy One, described in Genesis, who freely used his power to delight himself and to bless all that he touched. This is the life that we are called to share.

We have been created in the image of God’s primal generosity. Loving our neighbor is making a gift of what we have been given by God. Such loving answers to the deepest impulses within us. We love because of our God-given nature to love. Others are to be loved in

such a way that encourages them to become what Love Itself intends them to be. Jesus tells us his Good Samaritan story, for example, to help us find God while becoming the persons God intends us to be.

#### THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN (LUKE 10:25-37)

Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan offers surprising insights that shift his listener’s perspective. The parable is Jesus’ response to a lawyer asking Jesus what is life all about. Sometimes we put the issue in terms of what we must do to be saved, or how we can find our highest fulfillment, or what is the real reason for our existence. This issue has been framed in various ways and represents a well-nigh universal concern. Who has not at times wondered about what is involved in getting in touch with what is deepest and highest and most important in all existence?

Jesus responds to the lawyer, asking him what is written in the law. He realizes that most people are not empty vessels into which one pours answers directly. For the truth to make a difference in a person’s life, it has to connect with where that person is already. Jesus’ answering an inquiry with further questioning is his way of probing the questioner more deeply, finding out what is on their minds, and getting them involved in finding the answer that they are seeking.

The lawyer answered in the words that the Hebrew people had used for centuries in expressing their faith. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” Because these words represent the Jewish vision of reality, the religious background of all that Jesus taught, we must emphasize how seminal they are.

From the biblical perspective, there are only two orders of reality: the Uncreated, which has life in itself, and the created, which derives its life from the other. The latter is contingent reality: it is because Something Else has given it the right to be and has caused it to be. Nothing but God belongs on the Uncreated side of the line, and



everything except God belongs on the created side. God is being/life itself; creatures receive being/life.

The Hebrew understanding of this basic distinction made it clear that we are to relate to these two orders in radically different ways. We are to relate to the Uncreated—the already perfect and complete—by loving with all our hearts and minds and souls and strength; that is, we are to assume a stance of worship toward the One on whom we ultimately depend. We are to set that One in a category all alone, because there is absolutely nothing exactly like the Lord our God, who is distinct from all other realities. Correspondingly, we are invited to love everything else on the created side of the line the way a parent loves a child, or the way a gardener loves the seed that he carefully husbands to its fulfillment. Everything that derives its life from the Creator is to be nurtured; only the Lord God is to be worshipped and recognized as an absolute.

Understanding the distinction between these two realities and learning to relate appropriately to each of them is the secret of eternal life, the key to fulfilling the destiny that was intended for us. Whenever we relate to something that is not God in a worshipful stance, expecting from it everything that we humans need, such idolatrous behavior leads to profound disappointment. Whatever creature is elevated to a place of worship will inevitably leave us profoundly disillusioned. Our ultimate fulfillment derives from our divine Source. The Uncreated alone can satisfy the hunger of the human heart. Everything else is to be loved in such a way that encourages the creature to become what it has inside it to be. God is already complete and is to be loved accordingly, while everything else is in the process of coming to completion through and in God. Jesus' teachings rest on this understanding.

## JESUS THE PHYSICIAN

Like a good physician, Jesus applies the great love commandment to the unique idolatries of each individual. For example, Nicodemus was a Jewish leader, a person who probably prized

above all else that he had been born into this world a physical descendant of Abraham. He had taken something on the created side of the line and was treating it as if it were the Uncreated, which is why Jesus challenged him as he did: "You need to rethink this matter of being born all over again. It is the fact that you are a son of God, not a son of Abraham, that ought to matter most."

In the case of the Samaritan woman (John 4:4-42), however, the shape of her idolatry was quite different. She may have made sensuality and feeling the central focus in her life, which meant she needed to experience God as the source of her delight, rather than anything in the created realm.

The rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-22) on the other hand, did not worship his Jewish heritage or his feelings. It was his material possessions that had become the ultimate basis for his security and self-esteem. This is why Jesus said to him that he needed to give away that on which he had come to depend and begin to trust the Maker of all things. The ruler had confused the means by which he lived for the End for whom he should live. Jesus invited him to shift his ultimate allegiance.

Reading the gospels carefully, we discover that Jesus talked about the first law of Moses, the great love commandment, more than all the other nine put together. We are to have no other gods before the only God there is. We are, in other words, to love our Source as we love nothing else, and to love the rest of creation with the kind of nurturing support that enables it to grow and develop. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus, therefore, applauded the lawyer's formulation of the classic Hebrew vision.

The lawyer, however, apparently had other things on his agenda beyond finding out truth for himself. Instead of embracing the answer to the question he was asking and going out to live it, the lawyer attempted to save face by asking the further question. "who is my neighbor?" It had become clear what he was supposed to do: love God in one way and creation in another. Yet he resorted to a delaying tactic and raised the complex issue about what is a neighbor and how far does my

*We are, in other words, to love our Source as we love nothing else, and to love the rest of creation with the kind of nurturing support that enables it to grow and develop.*





responsibility go here. He might have been asking what is the least that he was required to do to get by.

Instead of giving him a direct answer, Jesus tells him the parable of the man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho who was robbed, beaten and left half-dead. Three familiar figures passed by where the stricken man was lying. The priest of the temple represented religion at its professional best, a man who had been given the responsibility of not only presiding over the sacrifices but also of keeping alive the traditions of Israel. The second to pass by was a Levite, who was a lower-level temple functionary, also responsible for carrying on the traditions of the Hebrews.

The third person making his way by the helpless victim was identified as “a Samaritan.” First-century Jews regarded Samaritans as heretical and racially distinct from Jews. They were despised and ostracized as a loathsome people. Jews would not have expected anything human, or heroic, or compassionate from a Samaritan.

The most distinctive thing about a parable is the element of surprise. Jesus’ story had the lawyer so captivated that his defenses were down. At that moment,

Jesus shocked him by getting him to say it was the Samaritan, not the priest or the Levite, who react humanely, even heroically, in that situation. The Samaritan was the one to stop and do what he could to help the victim. He put the beaten man on his beast of burden and took him to the nearest inn where the wounded man could have long-term care—and he paid for this out of his own pocket.

Jesus’ incredible example of “loving your neighbor” is from a person that no one in his society would have expected to be capable of such compassion. Jesus’ example challenged a long tradition among his people of finding ways to limit their liabilities. The term “neighbor” was repeatedly trimmed to smaller and smaller proportions; for example, only those who were descended from Abraham or who had property were considered neighbors.

However, Jesus turned in the other direction altogether and said that we are to think of ourselves as a neighbor. The question is not whether such and such a person is worthy of love, but rather, are we willing to take what we know, and what we can do and place all this at the disposal of another person’s needs or development.

We need to remember that creation comes out of God’s sheer generosity and that we are made in that image. What the Samaritan did on the Jericho road was to act out what it means to be made in the image of primal generosity. Loving one’s neighbor is making a gift of what we have been given by the Generous One. Loving our neighbors as ourselves answers to the deepest impulses within us. We love because it is our God-given nature to love. We are not to ask whether others are worthy, but rather, whether we are willing to act out the image of God that is within. In contrast to the two who did nothing for the stricken victim, the Samaritan knew enough to take what he had and place it at the disposal of another’s need.

We are never called on to give what we do not have, or to do things for people that we are not capable of doing. Our response to people involves more than just their needs. The particular shape of our giftedness is a determinant as well. It would be irresponsible to rush into situations where we do not have the ability to be part of the answer. We need to be careful, lest we project that love looks like doing the impossible. It really



consists in doing what we can with what we have for the help or development of another.

## FINDING OUR ULTIMATE SOURCE AND RESOURCE IN PARABLES

Just as the human body cannot survive without supplies from its environment, so the human person cannot survive without something beyond itself. The self-defensive concerns of the human person are rooted in the tension between desire and limits; they derive from the threats posed by the hazards of life and the fact of death. We are not self-sufficient. We experience the precariousness of our lives. We cannot ultimately be indifferent to our fate. We cannot live without some grounds for our faith and hope, without basic trust, without some basic conviction about our own worth and well-being in the present and in the future. If this affirmation is accepted, at least as an approximate generalization, it means that there is no human life that can be entirely neutral from a religious point of view: what grounds our basic faith is either God or an idol.

All idolatry is implicitly self-idolatry, making ourselves into a god, refusing to transcend ourselves in allegiance to the transcendent reality of the Supreme Good that is God alone. The worshiper of idols attempts to manipulate God, to make God serve his purposes. The tendency to idolatry reflects the temptation to self-sufficiency or self-fulfillment in the service of self-divinization. It represents an attempt to cope with the problem of evil, a self-protective attempt to evade the painful tension between desire and limitation. It takes many forms. The search for "religious experience" may become tantamount to idolatry: using God as a means to satisfy one's desires. Moral self-righteousness can express itself as legalism; the concern for "righteousness" expresses the urge for self-justification rather than an authentically theocentric self-transcendence. Knowledge may become an idol, may puff up the mind in ideological attempts to endow humankind and its historical range of action with the meaning of eschatological fulfillment. The tendency to idolatry

is the temptation to make oneself the guarantor of one's present and future worth and well-being; to overcome by oneself and for oneself the fear of failure, suffering and death; to be the master of one's own destiny.

If the human thrust to self-transcendence, which begins with the desire to know and extends to the desire to live responsibly, is to be brought to its fulfillment, there must be the hope of knowing Someone who transcends ourselves. If our willingness to know the truth (often unpleasant) and to accept responsibility and limitation (often difficult) is not to succumb to despair, then it must find an adequate source of freedom from temptation to self-protection and pseudo-solutions to the problems of life and death.

Jesus recounts parables to enlighten our search for peace and security; to tell of the infinite love and boundless hospitality of God that is the only true basis for human security, peace and self-esteem. His parables tell us the way that one lives whose ultimate security is rooted in the loving generosity of God, and of ways one succumbs to the temptation of self-sufficiency and self-idolatry.

All Jesus' parables imply that in religious conversion we no longer stand at the center of our own world in terms of what we know, hope for and love. They imply that God alone is the only and ultimate basis for our peace, security, dignity and self-esteem.

### THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN (LUKE 18:9-14)

With the possible exception of the story of the Good Samaritan, where a despised social outcast is depicted as morally superior to a priest and a Levite, no parable Jesus told could have been more shocking than his account of a Pharisee and a tax collector. The conclusion Jesus drew jarred the conventional religious wisdom of the day. Yet through the details of the parable, a vision of the Holy One became clear that is of great importance.

Jesus' listeners regarded the Pharisees as the most devout religious people in first-century Palestine. They sought purity in all things: law

observance, nationalism and in the care they took to avoid all contacts with the impure. They were the pillars of society, on the side of righteousness in every situation.

In contrast, the tax collectors were at the opposite end of the social strata. No other occupation was more despised. Whenever the Romans conquered a country, they recruited opportunistic citizens to collect revenues. Individuals who stooped to this work were regarded as scoundrels and reprehensible traitors of the worst sort.

It was no surprise for Jesus' audience that a Pharisee had gone up to the temple to pray. Pharisees were famous for their religious enthusiasm and righteousness. They believed that they were morally superior to most other human beings and made no secret of the pride they had in themselves or of their disdain of others.

The first element of surprise in the parable lies not in the Pharisee's performance, but in the presence of the tax collector. As a rule, tax collectors did not frequent the temple precincts or demonstrate the kind of contrition that Jesus depicts here. This individual remained far off, not even lifting his eyes to heaven, but beating his breast, the center of all decision making, praying simply that God be merciful to him, a sinner. The image of a repentant tax collector defied all the stereotypes of the day.

We can imagine the shock that followed Jesus' next statement: "I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted." To suggest that the all-righteous Creator of the universe, the Author of the Ten Commandments, would be more pleased with a traitorous scoundrel than a person of moral rectitude was staggering in light of what the people had been taught all their lives. Jesus turned upside down their conventional system of values. He seemed to suggest that it really did not matter what people did with their lives, and that one sort of behavior was not different from another. A superficial understanding of his parable could lead to moral chaos.



The Pharisee says in all honesty that he is not a thief, a rogue or an adulterer. The way he depicts himself represents real moral achievement. Ordering his business affairs along the lines of justice and honesty and his personal interactions along the lines of non-exploitative chastity is no small achievement. We ask ourselves, "If we did not have people like this Pharisee, how long could society last? What permanence and stability would there be to any social fabric if there were not many folk who chose to use their power responsibly?"

The Pharisee goes on to report that he fasts twice weekly and tithes a tenth of his income. Obviously, he is serious about his religion because it affects his stomach and his pocketbook. He is not like people who turn to God only when some crisis occurs; rather, he allows his belief in God to affect the level of his bodily comfort. Fasting has never been a pleasant experience.

The Pharisee's spiritual practice of tithing is again a significant act; money is one of the most basic forms of potency available to human beings. It enables us to do and have any number of things, which is why it is such an ally to our egoism. It enables us to have our own way in a variety of forms. Voluntarily to relinquish control over any part of it out of loyalty to and affection for God is again a significant religious act.

The Pharisee was serious enough about God to let his devotion affect both his stomach and his pocketbook. For Jesus to suggest that he was religiously inferior to a man who had no spiritual track record at all, but in a moment of desperate crisis came begging for mercy was understandably upsetting. There is no indication in the parable that the tax collector intended to change his behavior or promised any reparation at all. He simply cried out for mercy in time of need, which is religion at its most primitive, self-centered level. Little wonder that Jesus' hearers were aghast.

This Pharisee had obviously reached a level of moral maturity. He had established control over his physical impulses and was the master of his money rather than allowing his money to be master over him. He had, however,

made a serious mistake in his spiritual itinerary: he took his eyes off the completeness that is the high calling of God. He began to compare himself to the people alongside him rather than to the Holy One, the true Omega Point out ahead.

Two devastating effects follow this shift of focus: the Pharisee grew proud of himself and the level to which he had risen and complacent about the distance that still remained between himself and the Holy One. Jesus used this example to show that when our focus is deflected from the Holy One, our growth into spiritual maturity is dealt a lethal blow. Jesus' call to the perfection of our heavenly Father (Matthew 5:48) means that the Holy One is the ultimate measure of holiness. Where we choose to fix our focus in our spiritual life is all-important. The sidelong glance at our neighbor deflects our attention from the Holy One, substituting our self-righteousness for the only true norm of holiness. This is what Jesus criticized in the Pharisee.

The tax collector, on the other hand, had achieved little in the field of moral development. He was far from what God wanted him to be, but he was sincerely acknowledging his lack and crying out to the Holy One for help. Jesus does not tell us what brought him to his senses and to his knees. In all likelihood, some graced event had made him aware of how out of line he was with the true self God was calling him to be.

#### THE PARABLES AS A MIRROR

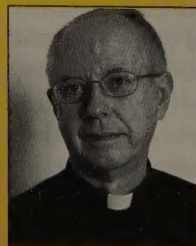
The parables are about us, not about others. They are mirrors—not portraits of other people. In this context, the Pharisee reflects our tendency to become complacent in self-righteousness over our past achievements. The tax collector reflects both our contrition for the culpable failures of our past and our graced hope in the Holy One for our future.

With God, the future is always more significant than the past. The Holy One is more interested in what we can become than in what we used to be. Jesus' point here is not one of moral relativity, as if it does not matter how

we live or what we do. It is rather our hope and trust in the Holy One that is of utmost importance.

Jesus reminds us in the parable that the criteria for evaluating our lives should not be what other people are doing or failing to do. God has created us to participate in his life and joy. That is our true, God-given reason for being rather than not being. The Good News is that the One who began such a sharing has the ability and the mercy and the patience to achieve the fulfillment for which he has created us, if we will only allow him.

The parable also reminds us that God alone is the one to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden. The One who saw deep into the heart of the tax collector perceives our true dreams, hopes and aspirations and judges accordingly. We have all fallen short of what we were meant to be, yet there is something infinitely greater than our past or our sin, and that is the boundless mercy and grace of God.



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